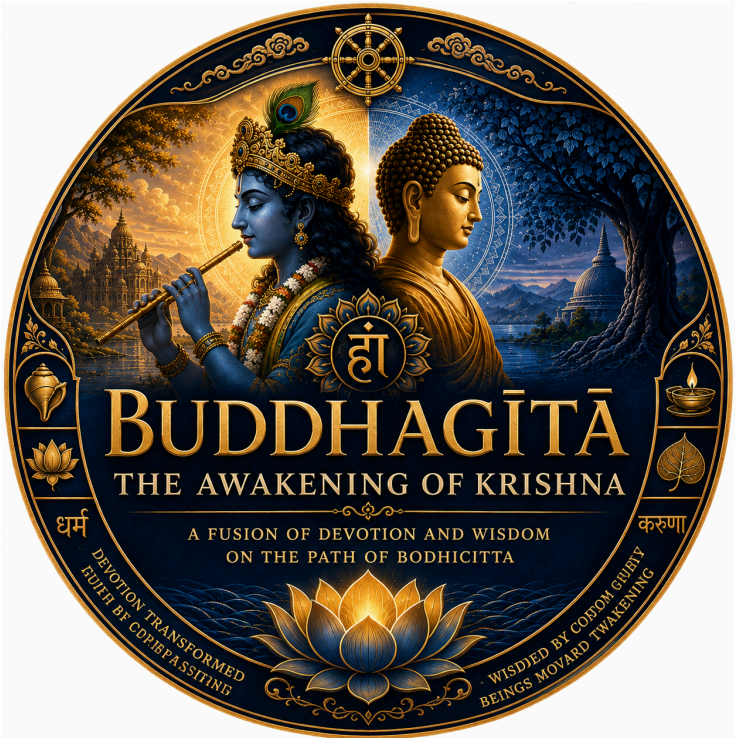
Buddhagītā

The Awakening of Krishna PART 1



Dedication..... 35
Copyright & License.....37
Preface.....39
The Purpose of This Book.....39
The Akṣobhyavyūha Framework.....42
Wisdom Beyond Conceit.....44
Compassion for All Traditions..... 44
Part I — The Lord of Goloka.....45
Chapter 1 — The Realm Above the Heavens.....45
Goloka Within the Thirty-One Planes.....45
The Splendor of the Deva Realm.....49
The Merit That Produced Krishna's Birth.....52
Chapter 2 — The Great Deva Krishna..... 56
Extraordinary Powers..... 56
Compassionate Rule..... 59
The Seeds of Conceit.....62
Mistaking Long Life for Eternity..... 65
Chapter 3 — How the Belief in Supreme Divinity Arose. 68
Countless Devotees.....68
Miracles and Their Limits..... 72
The Formation of the View "I Am the Highest".....74
Ignorance Hidden Within Great Merit.....75
Part II — Krishna Descends into the Human World.....80
Chapter 4 — Birth Among Human Beings..... 80
Taking Human Form..... 80
The Age of Conflict..... 83
Meeting Arjuna..... 85
Teaching According to Present Understanding.....87
Chapter 5 — The Dialogue on the Battlefield..... 90

Teaching According to Present Understanding..... 90
Duty, Devotion, and Action.....94
The Vision of the Cosmic Form..... 96
The Sincerity of Krishna's Earlier Teaching.....100
Chapter 6 — The Limits of Heavenly Knowledge..... 102
Why Even Great Devas Can Be Mistaken.....103
What Krishna Could See..... 105
What Still Remained Hidden.....108
The Horizon of Knowledge..... 110
The Lamp and the Sun.....112
Part III — The Buddha Enters Goloka.....115
Chapter 7 — The Compassion of the Tathāgata.....115
Surveying the World Systems..... 115
Why the Buddha Visited Goloka.....118
The Assembly of the Devas..... 120
Chapter 8 — "Are You Permanent?"..... 124
The Question.....124
Universes Arising and Passing Away.....127
Seeing Goloka's Impermanence.....130
The First Crack in Conceit.....135
Chapter 9 — Reality as It Truly Is..... 138
Impermanence..... 138
Dependent Origination..... 141
Emptiness.....145
Non-Self.....148
The End of Conceit.....151
Part IV — Krishna's Great Repentance..... 155
Chapter 10 — Tears Before the Buddha.....155

Confession....155
Humility....157
Bowing Before Perfect Wisdom....159
The Buddha Speaks on Repentance....161
The Crown Laid Aside....163
Chapter 11 — The Bodhisattva Vow....166
Renouncing Claims of Supremacy....166
Infinite Compassion....168
The Great Aspiration....170
Part V — Revisiting the Earlier Teachings....174
Chapter 12 — Speaking Again to Arjuna....174
Returning in Vision....174
A New Dialogue....177
Correcting Earlier Misunderstandings....179
The Heart of Devotion....181
The Friend Who Walks Beside....183
Chapter 13 — Reconsidering Īśvara....185
The Meaning of Lordship....185
Devas and Their Limitations....188
The Illusion of Independence....190
Beyond the Idea of a Supreme Self....192
Krishna's Reflection....194
Chapter 14 — Reconsidering Brahman....196
The Unconditioned and the Conditioned....196
Suchness and Conceptual Absolutes....199
Beyond Eternalism and Nihilism....201
The Finger and the Moon....203
Krishna's New Understanding....205

Chapter 15 — Reconsidering Viṣṇu..... 207
Cosmic Compassion Without Eternal Self..... 208
Symbol and Reality..... 210
Skillful Means.....212
A New Understanding of Devotion.....214
The All-Pervading Dharma..... 215
Chapter 16 — The Universal Form Revisited..... 218
The Earlier Vision.....218
The Difference Between Cosmic Magnitude and Awakening..... 220
Miracles Do Not Equal Omniscience..... 222
Seeing the Universal Form Anew.....225
Krishna's New Teaching..... 226
A Question Yet Unanswered.....228
Chapter 17 — The Meaning of Avatar.....229
Compassionate Manifestation.....229
Birth Through Karma..... 231
The River of Vows.....234
Why Even Great Beings Continue Learning..... 236
The Bodhisattva Appears Wherever Needed.....237
Krishna's Resolution.....239
Part VI — Bhakti Transformed.....241
Chapter 18 — Calling the Devotees Together.....241
The Great Assembly.....241
Krishna's Confession..... 244
Joy Mixed with Sorrow..... 247
The Buddha Addresses the Devotees..... 250
The Turning of Devotion.....251
Chapter 19 — The New Meaning of Bhakti..... 253

Love Without Delusion....254
Devotion Without Attachment....255
Loving Krishna as a Spiritual Friend....257
Chanting as Mindfulness....259
Remembering Krishna as a Spiritual Friend....261
Chapter 20 — Chanting with Right View....264
Remembering Virtue....265
The Four Recollections....267
Cultivating Loving-Kindness....268
Bhakti as Bodhicitta....270
A New Mantra....272
The Name as a Raft....274
Chapter 21 — Honoring the Buddha....276
Why Krishna Calls the Buddha His Teacher....276
Wisdom Above Miraculous Power....279
Humility as the Highest Ornament....280
Taking Refuge....283
Chapter 22 — The Union of Wisdom and Devotion....286
Bhakti and Prajñā....286
Compassion and Emptiness....289
The Lotus and the Mirror....291
The Bodhisattva Ideal....293
Devotion Becomes the Way....295
The Buddha's Final Blessing....297
Part VII — The Akṣobhyavyūha Revelation....299
Chapter 23 — Meeting Akṣobhya Buddha....299
The Imperturbable One....299
Entering the Pure Land....302

The Nature of Imperturbability....304
Suchness Revealed.... 306
The Adamantine Mind....308
Chapter 24 — Abhirati Beyond the Heavens.... 311
Pure Lands and Deva Worlds....311
Why Goloka Is Not Final Liberation....313
The Purpose of Goloka....315
The Path Beyond Saṃsāra....317
Krishna's New Mission....319
Part VIII — The New Mission of Krishna....321
Chapter 25 — Krishna Teaches the Dharma.... 321
The First Public Sermon.... 321
A New Beginning....322
The Four Noble Truths.... 324
The Noble Eightfold Path....326
Devotion Finds Its Fulfillment.... 329
The Buddha Entrusts Krishna....330
Chapter 26 — The Future of Goloka.... 332
A Realm Transformed.... 332
The Schools of the Dharma.... 334
Welcoming New Arrivals.... 335
The Pilgrimage Eastward....337
The Joy of Letting Go....339
A Prophecy.... 340
Part IX — The Final Exhortation....342
Chapter 27 — Krishna's Last Address to His Devotees 342
The Assembly of Farewell....343
What I Ask of You....345

Do Not Cling to Me.....346
Honor Every Path That Leads to Wisdom.....347
The Three Gifts.....349
The Final Bow.....350
Chapter 28 — The Sūtra's Conclusion.....352
Thus the Teaching Was Preserved.....352
Krishna's Continuing Vow.....354
The Buddha's Final Words.....356
The Departure.....357
The Rejoicing of the Assembly.....359
The Colophon.....360
Appendix I — The New Way of Devotion.....362
Questions Asked by the Devotees.....362
Question One.....363
Question Two.....363
Question Three.....364
Question Four.....365
Question Five.....366
Question Six.....367
Krishna's Closing Instruction.....368
Appendix II — The Akṣobhyavyūha Framework Explained.....369
The Purpose of the Framework.....369
The Five Pillars.....370
First: Impermanence.....370
Second: Dependent Origination.....371
Third: Emptiness.....371
Fourth: Suchness.....372
Fifth: Bodhicitta.....372

The Three Transformations..... 373
The Adamantine Mind.....374
Goloka Within the Framework..... 375
The Final Summary..... 376
Appendix III — The Vows of Krishna Bodhisattva..... 377
The Forty-Eight Aspirations of Krishna Bodhisattva....377
Epilogue — The Eastern Lotus..... 381
Afterword — The Lamp Is Passed On..... 384
Volume I — The Sūtra — The Goloka Transformation Sūtra..... 390
Krishna's Awakening Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework..... 390
Chapter One..... 390
The Buddha Surveys Goloka.....390
Chapter Two..... 395
Krishna, Lord of the Celestial Realm..... 395
Chapter Three..... 402
The Question of Permanence.....402
Chapter Four..... 410
Krishna's Awakening..... 410
Chapter Five..... 418
The Teaching to the Devotees.....418
Chapter Six..... 426
Goloka Becomes a Field of Dharma.....426
Volume II — The Commentary of Krishna Bodhisattva434
Part I — Revisiting the Bhagavad Gītā..... 434
Chapter 1 — The Crisis of Arjuna Reconsidered..... 434
Homage..... 434
Why I Have Written This Commentary.....435

Why Arjuna's Despair Was Sacred.....436
My Earlier Intention..... 438
The Crisis Beneath the Crisis..... 439
The Battlefield as a Mirror..... 441
The Akṣobhyavyūha Reading.....442
Meditation.....443
Concluding Reflection.....445
Chapter 2 — The Self Reconsidered..... 445
The Verse That Changed My Understanding..... 445
What I Formerly Believed..... 447
The Blessed Buddha's Question..... 448
The Error Was Not Investigation.....451
The Five Aggregates.....452
The River Revisited.....453
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation..... 455
Meditation.....457
Concluding Reflection.....458
Chapter 3 — Karma-Yoga Reconsidered.....459
Action Without Attachment Revisited.....459
Why I First Taught Karma-Yoga..... 460
The Blessed Buddha's Further Question.....462
The Gardener..... 463
Karma Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework..... 465
Acting Without Ownership.....466
The Empty Hands..... 468
Meditation.....469
Concluding Reflection.....470
Chapter 4 — Jñāna-Yoga Reconsidered..... 471

Knowledge and Awakening.....471
My Earlier Understanding of Jñāna.....472
The Buddha's Teaching on Right View..... 473
The Scholar and the Ferryman.....475
Knowledge That Creates Pride.....477
Prajñā and Conceptual Knowledge.....478
The Library of Goloka.....479
Meditation.....481
Concluding Reflection.....482
Chapter 5 — Renunciation Reconsidered.....483
What Does It Mean to Renounce?.....483
What I Formerly Thought.....484
The Buddha's Bowl.....486
The Empty Palace.....487
Renunciation Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework..... 489
Goloka After the Transformation..... 490
The Greatest Renunciation..... 491
Meditation.....492
Concluding Reflection.....494
Chapter 6 — Meditation Reconsidered.....494
The Discipline of the Mind.....495
My Earlier Practice.....496
Samādhi and Prajñā..... 497
The Archer and the Mirror.....498
Meditation Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework...500
Goloka Learns to Meditate..... 501
The Deepest Meditation.....503
Meditation.....504

Concluding Reflection.....506
Chapter 7 — Knowing the Divine Reconsidered.....507
The Question of God..... 507
Why I Believed I Was the Supreme.....508
The Limits of Heavenly Knowledge..... 509
The Mountain and the Horizon.....511
Īśvara Reconsidered.....512
Omnipresence Reconsidered..... 513
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation..... 515
Meditation.....516
Concluding Reflection.....517
Chapter 8 — Brahman Reconsidered..... 518
The Search for the Absolute..... 518
Why the Mind Seeks Permanence..... 519
My Former Experience.....521
The Open Sky..... 523
Suchness Is Not a Substance..... 524
The Ocean and the Wave..... 526
Brahman Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework..... 527
Meditation.....528
Concluding Reflection.....530
Chapter 9 — The Royal Knowledge Reconsidered.....531
The Most Precious Knowledge.....531
What Makes Knowledge Royal?..... 532
The Buddha's Teaching on Noble Wealth.....534
The King and the Beggar.....535
The Greatest Secret.....536
Faith Reconsidered..... 538

The Royal Knowledge Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework....539
Meditation....540
Concluding Reflection....540
Chapter 10 — The Divine Manifestations Reconsidered..... 542
Seeing the Extraordinary.... 542
The Buddha's Question....543
The Mistake of Ownership.... 544
The Jewel in Every Direction....546
The New Understanding of Manifestation.... 547
Excellence as Interdependence....548
Goloka's New Festivals.... 549
Meditation....551
Concluding Reflection....552
Chapter 11 — The Universal Form Reconsidered..... 554
The Vision That Changed Arjuna....554
What Arjuna Truly Saw....555
The Buddha's Question....556
The Mirror of Many Worlds.... 557
Awe Is Not Yet Awakening....558
Time the Destroyer.... 560
The Universal Form Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework....561
Goloka's New Interpretation....562
Meditation....564
Concluding Reflection....565
Chapter 12 — Bhakti-Yoga Reconsidered..... 566
The Path of Devotion Revisited....566

What Is Bhakti?..... 567
The Buddha's Teaching on Loving-Kindness.....568
The Child and the Teacher.....570
Why I Point Beyond Myself.....571
Devotion Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework..... 573
The Garland of Lotuses..... 574
The Highest Offering.....575
Meditation.....576
Concluding Reflection.....577
Chapter 13 — The Three Guṇas Reconsidered.....579
The Nature of Human Tendencies..... 579
My Earlier Understanding..... 580
The Buddha's Teaching on Habits..... 581
The Three Travelers.....582
Beyond Sattva.....584
The Guṇas Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework...585
Goloka's New Teaching.....586
Meditation.....588
Concluding Reflection.....589
Chapter 14 — Puruṣa and Prakṛti Reconsidered..... 590
The Ancient Question.....590
Why the Distinction Appeared Convincing.....591
The Buddha's Gentle Investigation.....592
The Lamp.....594
The Mirror Reconsidered.....595
Puruṣa Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework..... 596
Prakṛti Reconsidered.....598
Goloka's Lesson.....599

Meditation....600
Concluding Reflection....601
Chapter 15 — The Supreme Person Reconsidered.....603
The Meaning of Puruṣottama.... 603
Why I Believed Supremacy Existed....604
The Buddha's Teaching on Comparison.... 605
The Empty Throne....606
What Is Truly Supreme?....608
The Bodhisattva and the King.... 609
Puruṣottama Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework 610
Krishna's New Understanding.... 611
Meditation....612
Concluding Reflection....614
Chapter 16 — The Divine and Demonic Qualities Reconsidered....615
Beyond Divine and Demonic Birth.... 615
My Greatest Delusion....617
The Buddha's Question....618
The Lotus and the Mud....619
The True Demons.... 620
Divine Qualities Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework 622
Goloka Learns Humility.... 623
Meditation....625
Concluding Reflection....626
Chapter 17 — Faith Reconsidered.... 627
Three Kinds of Faith....627
My Earlier Understanding of Faith....629
The Buddha's Teaching on Confidence.... 630

The Two Travelers.....631
Faith and Doubt.....633
Taking Refuge.....634
Faith Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework.....635
Goloka's New Pilgrimage.....636
Meditation.....637
Concluding Reflection.....638
Chapter 18 — Liberation Reconsidered..... 640
The Fulfillment of the Path.....640
What Is Liberation?.....641
Renunciation Completed.....642
Dharma Reconsidered.....644
The Bodhisattva Path.....645
The Verse I Most Needed to Reconsider.....646
My Own Refuge.....647
The Final Meeting with Arjuna.....648
The Blessing.....650
Concluding Reflection.....652
Volume II — The Commentary of Krishna Bodhisattva653
Part II — A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā..... 653
Introduction.....653
Chapter One..... 654
Bhagavad Gītā 2:11.....654
My Earlier Intention.....655
What Was Incomplete.....655
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....656
Meditation.....657
Concluding Reflection.....658

Chapter Two..... 658
Bhagavad Gītā 2:20..... 658
My Earlier Intention.....658
What the Blessed Buddha Revealed..... 659
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....660
Meditation..... 660
Concluding Reflection..... 661
Chapter Three..... 661
Bhagavad Gītā 2:47..... 661
My Earlier Intention.....661
What Was Deepened..... 662
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....662
Meditation..... 663
Concluding Reflection..... 663
Krishna's Closing Words for These First Three Verses. 664
Chapter Four..... 665
Bhagavad Gītā 2:22..... 665
My Earlier Intention.....665
What the Blessed Buddha Revealed..... 666
The Flame..... 668
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....669
Meditation..... 670
Concluding Reflection..... 671
Chapter Five..... 672
Bhagavad Gītā 4:7–8..... 672
My Earlier Intention.....672
What the Blessed Buddha Revealed..... 673
The Meaning of Avatāra Reconsidered.....674

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....675
Meditation.....676
Concluding Reflection.....677
Chapter Six.....678
Bhagavad Gītā 4:13.....678
My Earlier Intention.....678
The Blessed Buddha's Question.....679
Karma Is Not Caste.....681
The Community of the Dharma.....681
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....683
Meditation.....684
Concluding Reflection.....685
Chapter Seven.....685
Bhagavad Gītā 4:34.....685
My Earlier Intention.....686
Becoming the Disciple.....686
The Buddha's Teaching on Spiritual Friendship.....687
Questioning With Reverence.....688
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....689
Meditation.....690
Concluding Reflection.....691
Chapter Eight.....691
Bhagavad Gītā 7:7.....692
My Earlier Intention.....692
The Day My Certainty Ended.....693
The Thread Reconsidered.....694
The Buddha's Net.....696
The Error of Centrality.....697

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation..... 698
Why I Now Point Beyond Myself..... 699
Meditation.....700
Concluding Reflection.....701
Chapter Nine.....702
Bhagavad Gītā 7:19..... 702
My Earlier Intention.....702
The Blessed Buddha's Question..... 703
"Vāsudeva Is All" Reconsidered..... 704
The Rare Great Soul..... 706
The Ocean.....707
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation..... 709
Meditation.....710
Concluding Reflection.....711
Chapter Ten..... 712
Bhagavad Gītā 9:22..... 712
My Earlier Intention.....712
The Blessed Buddha's Question..... 713
What Is Truly Preserved?..... 715
What Do We Truly Lack?.....716
The Mother Bird.....717
Single-Pointed Devotion Reconsidered.....719
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation..... 719
Goloka's New Prayer..... 720
Meditation.....721
Concluding Reflection.....723
Chapter Eleven..... 724
Bhagavad Gītā 9:26..... 724

My Earlier Intention....724
The Blessed Buddha's Question....725
The Transformation of Worship....726
The Bodhisattva's Altar....727
The Blessed Buddha's Offering....729
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation....730
Goloka's New Temples....731
Meditation....732
Concluding Reflection....733
Chapter Twelve....734
Bhagavad Gītā 9:29....734
My Earlier Intention....734
The Blessed Buddha's Question....735
Equal Love....737
"Those Who Dwell in Me"....738
The Physician....739
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation....740
Goloka Learns Equanimity....741
Meditation....743
Concluding Reflection....744
Chapter Thirteen....745
Bhagavad Gītā 9:30–31....745
My Earlier Intention....745
The Blessed Buddha's Question....746
Angulimāla....748
What Is Right Resolve?....749
"My Devotee Never Perishes"....750
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation....751

Goloka's Gate of Reconciliation.....752
Meditation.....754
Concluding Reflection.....755
Chapter Fourteen.....756
Bhagavad Gītā 10:8.....756
My Earlier Intention.....757
The Blessed Buddha's Question.....758
The Seed and the Forest.....759
Beginninglessness.....760
The Source Reconsidered.....762
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....763
Goloka's New Cosmology.....763
Meditation.....765
Concluding Reflection.....766
Chapter Fifteen.....767
Bhagavad Gītā 10:20.....767
My Earlier Intention.....767
The Blessed Buddha's Question.....768
The Heart of Every Being.....770
The Buddha's Lamp.....771
Beginning, Middle, and End.....772
The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation.....773
Goloka's New Greeting.....774
Meditation.....775
Concluding Reflection.....776

Non-Conceptual
Apophatic
Esoteric
Non-Dual
Buddhist-Sethian Mystic

No Brahman,
only void,
emptiness

Conceptual
Cataphatic
Eternal Self
Non-Dualist

That is full; this also is full;
from fullness comes fullness;
When fullness is extracted
from fullness, only
fullness remains.

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha

Akshobya Buddha

Krishna Bodhisattva

Reverend Moshe Reed, Servant and Prophet of Logos

Sādhaka Abhiratimi (Reverend Moshe Reed)

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all sincere seekers,

to those who question with humility,

who practice with patience,

who serve with compassion,

and who never cease walking the path toward wisdom.

May this work encourage dialogue rather than division,

understanding rather than certainty,

and compassion rather than pride.

With profound respect for the enduring wisdom of the Bhagavad Gītā, the Dharma of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, and the countless teachers who have guided beings toward truth throughout the ages.

May whatever merit arises from this work be dedicated without reservation to the welfare and awakening of all sentient beings.

May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings awaken.

Copyright & License

Buddhagītā: The Awakening of Krishna PART 1
Copyright © 2026 by The Logos / Moshe Reed
ISBN:

This book is intended for informational, educational, and spiritual purposes only. It does not provide medical, legal, or professional advice and makes no claims to prevent, treat, or cure any disease or condition. Readers should consult a qualified professional for any health or legal concerns.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

To view a copy of this license, visit:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/

This means you are free to:
* **Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
* **Adapt** — remix, transform, and build upon the material

for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.

Under the following terms:
* **Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit, credit must be given to the Logos. Provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
* **ShareAlike** — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

Krishna encounters the Buddha and reinterprets the Bhagavad Gītā through the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva Path, revealing devotion transformed into wisdom and compassion.

Preface

The Purpose of This Book

For countless generations, seekers have gazed toward the heavens, searching for that which is beyond birth and death. Some have sought truth through devotion, others through meditation, others through philosophical inquiry, and still others through compassionate service. Though their paths have differed, the longing of the heart has remained the same: to know reality as it truly is and to be free from suffering.

This book presents the account of Krishna's awakening through the light of the Buddha's Dharma as understood within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework. It tells of a great deva whose immeasurable merit, extraordinary powers, vast lifespan, and countless devoted followers gradually gave rise to the subtle belief that he himself was the highest reality. Yet even such exalted glory remained conditioned, impermanent, and dependent upon causes and conditions.

The Buddha, out of boundless compassion, did not condemn Krishna, nor did he seek to diminish the goodness that Krishna had cultivated throughout innumerable lives. Rather, seeing that even the most radiant heavenly being remained subject to ignorance, the Tathāgata journeyed to Goloka and revealed the Dharma directly.

Upon realizing impermanence, dependent origination, emptiness, and non-self, Krishna's conceit vanished. His compassion deepened beyond anything he had previously imagined. Instead of seeking worship, he sought the liberation of all beings. Instead of proclaiming himself supreme, he bowed before the Buddha in gratitude and resolved to walk the Bodhisattva Path until every sentient being crossed beyond suffering.

This work therefore explores devotion transformed by wisdom. It teaches that love need not be abandoned, but purified. Faith need not disappear, but mature. Reverence need not end, but become free from attachment and delusion.

The chapters that follow recount Krishna's heavenly life, his descent into the human world, his dialogue with Arjuna, the formation of his earlier understanding, his encounter with the Buddha, his direct realization of the Dharma, his repentance, his Bodhisattva vow, and his compassionate re-teaching of his devotees. Throughout these teachings, familiar concepts are revisited in light of dependent origination, allowing devotion and wisdom to become harmonious rather than opposed.

The intention is not to extinguish the flame of devotion, but to refine it until it burns without smoke. When devotion is joined with wisdom, it becomes compassion without limit. When wisdom is joined with compassion, it becomes the activity of the Bodhisattvas.

Thus Krishna teaches not, "Remain with me forever," but rather, "Do not stop with me. Walk beyond all attachment,

beyond all conceit, beyond every fixed view, until reality is known directly. Then, having crossed beyond suffering, return with compassion for the welfare of all beings."

May those who read these pages cultivate generosity free from pride, morality free from fear, patience free from resentment, diligence free from ambition, meditation free from distraction, and wisdom free from clinging.

May heavenly beings recognize the limits of heavenly existence.

May human beings recognize the precious opportunity afforded by human birth.

May those devoted to Krishna deepen their compassion for every living being.

May those devoted to the Buddha deepen their humility toward every sincere seeker.

May all who read these teachings abandon attachment to superiority, recognize the impermanent nature of all conditioned things, awaken to Suchness, and dedicate every thought, word, and deed to the liberation of all sentient beings.

If even one being develops greater compassion, greater humility, greater wisdom, and greater peace through these pages, then their purpose has been fulfilled.

May all beings attain unsurpassed awakening.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

The teachings presented in this volume are arranged according to the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, a systematic presentation of reality centered upon Akṣobhya Buddha, the Imperturbable One, whose Pure Land of Abhirati symbolizes unwavering wisdom grounded in Suchness.

Within this framework, existence is understood as a vast network of dependent origination extending throughout innumerable world systems. Every realm—from the deepest hells to the highest heavens—arises through causes and conditions. None possesses independent, permanent existence. Even the most radiant celestial kingdoms, though magnificent beyond imagination, remain within saṃsāra so long as ignorance persists.

The Thirty-One Planes of Existence provide the broad structure of conditioned reality. Human beings occupy only one small portion of this immeasurable cosmos. Above them dwell countless devas possessing extraordinary lifespans, beauty, happiness, and supernatural abilities. Yet these blessings, however exalted, remain impermanent. When their karma is exhausted, even the greatest devas continue their journey through birth and death.

Goloka is understood within this framework as one such exceedingly sublime heavenly realm. It surpasses ordinary human comprehension in beauty and bliss, yet it remains a conditioned deva world rather than final liberation. Its ruler, Krishna, accumulated inconceivable merit through

compassion, generosity, and virtuous conduct across countless lifetimes, eventually attaining birth there as a great deva endowed with miraculous powers and vast influence over innumerable beings.

Possessing extraordinary abilities, Krishna sincerely desired the welfare of those devoted to him. Yet because his wisdom had not yet fully penetrated the nature of dependent origination, a subtle conceit remained. Mistaking immeasurable greatness for ultimate reality, he believed himself to be eternal and supreme.

The Buddha's appearance within Goloka marks the turning point of this work. Rather than opposing compassion with wisdom, the Buddha perfects compassion through wisdom. Krishna's devotion to the welfare of others is not rejected but completed, transformed into the limitless activity of a Bodhisattva whose humility equals his compassion.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Framework therefore teaches that miraculous powers do not establish omniscience, celestial authority does not establish ultimacy, and vast devotion does not by itself eliminate ignorance. Only direct realization of impermanence, dependent origination, emptiness, and non-self uproots the conceit that binds beings—even heavenly beings—to saṃsāra.

Yet realization does not extinguish love. Instead, wisdom purifies love until it embraces all beings equally. In this purified devotion, Krishna no longer seeks worship for himself but rejoices whenever beings progress toward

awakening, whether through his guidance, through the Buddha's teaching, or through any skillful means leading to liberation.

Thus the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework presents the union of profound wisdom and boundless compassion as inseparable aspects of awakening. Wisdom without compassion becomes cold abstraction; compassion without wisdom remains vulnerable to attachment. Together they form the adamantine path walked by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas throughout limitless worlds.

Wisdom Beyond Conceit

The greatest obstacle to awakening is not hatred, nor greed alone, but the subtle conceit that mistakes the conditioned for the unconditioned. Conceit may arise in kings, ascetics, scholars, heavenly beings, or ordinary people alike. It is especially difficult to perceive when accompanied by genuine virtue and extraordinary accomplishment.

Krishna's journey reveals that even immense goodness can coexist with incomplete understanding. His awakening demonstrates that true greatness is measured not by power, followers, miracles, or praise, but by the willingness to relinquish every illusion when confronted by truth.

Humility is therefore the crown of wisdom.

Compassion for All Traditions

Throughout immeasurable ages, beings have sought truth according to their capacities. Different teachings, symbols, languages, and practices have inspired countless hearts toward generosity, ethical conduct, meditation, and love.

This work invites readers to cultivate compassion rather than contempt, dialogue rather than hostility, and sincere inquiry rather than pride. Whatever leads beings toward greater kindness, wisdom, and freedom from suffering is worthy of careful reflection.

May every path that encourages compassion become a bridge toward awakening.

May every sincere seeker become a friend upon the Way.

May all beings attain unsurpassed Buddhahood.

Part I — The Lord of Goloka

Chapter 1 — The Realm Above the Heavens

Goloka Within the Thirty-One Planes

Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One, the Tathāgata Śākyamuni Buddha, was dwelling at Jetavana Monastery near Śrāvastī, surrounded by a great assembly of monks, nuns, Bodhisattvas, devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, and countless beings from innumerable world systems.

Having entered profound samādhi, the Buddha surveyed the immeasurable cosmos with the Eye of Perfect Wisdom.

He beheld countless universes arising and ceasing like bubbles upon the ocean.

He beheld the hell realms, where beings exhausted the fruits of hatred.

He beheld the realms of hungry ghosts, where craving became unending hunger.

He beheld the animal realms, where fear and instinct concealed wisdom.

He beheld the human realm, difficult to obtain yet uniquely suited for awakening.

He beheld the heavens of desire, where joy was abundant though impermanent.

He beheld the heavens of form, serene through meditation yet still conditioned.

He beheld the formless attainments, subtle beyond conception yet not beyond birth and death.

Beyond these, throughout immeasurable world systems, there also existed innumerable celestial domains known only to the devas who dwelt within them—vast heavens born from extraordinary karma, inaccessible to ordinary perception, yet still woven into the fabric of dependent origination.

Among these shone one realm brighter than countless jeweled suns.

Its name was **Goloka**.

Its radiance spread across innumerable heavens.

Its music was carried upon winds fragrant with celestial blossoms.

Its rivers flowed not with ordinary water but with crystal streams reflecting every color of the rainbow.

Trees bore jewels instead of fruit.

Lotuses larger than cities floated upon lakes of sapphire.

The air itself shimmered with peace.

No hunger troubled its inhabitants.

No disease weakened their bodies.

No violence disturbed their minds.

Every sound resembled perfect music.

Every breeze carried delight.

Every moment surpassed the greatest happiness imaginable within the human world.

The devas dwelling there possessed luminous bodies.

They neither aged as humans age nor suffered the heaviness of flesh.

Their lives extended across spans so vast that entire civilizations arose and vanished upon distant worlds before even a single season passed in Goloka.

Many believed this realm to be eternal.

Many believed nothing could surpass it.

Even devas from other heavens journeyed there to behold its beauty.

Poets praised it.

Sages contemplated it.

Gods honored it.

Throughout countless worlds its fame spread without measure.

Yet the Blessed One perceived what none of its inhabitants yet understood.

Goloka had once arisen.

Therefore Goloka would one day cease.

Though its causes extended beyond calculation, they nevertheless depended upon causes.

What depends upon causes cannot be eternal.

The Buddha quietly reflected:

"Even here, suffering remains hidden beneath delight.

Where impermanence exists, attachment eventually brings sorrow.

Where self is imagined, ignorance remains.

Where ignorance remains, saṃsāra continues."

His compassion extended equally toward every being dwelling within that radiant heaven.

For though they rejoiced in immeasurable bliss, they had not yet crossed beyond birth and death.

Among all who dwelt there, one shone brighter than every other.

His name was Krishna.

The Splendor of the Deva Realm

At the center of Goloka stood a city unlike any found within the worlds of men.

Its walls were formed from translucent crystal that reflected neither shadow nor stain.

Golden towers stretched beyond the clouds.

Bridges woven from radiant light connected palace to palace without pillar or support.

Every pathway bloomed with celestial flowers whose fragrance inspired serenity rather than attachment.

There were no prisons.

There were no battlefields.

There were no marketplaces driven by greed.

Every dwelling reflected the virtue accumulated by its inhabitants through countless previous lives.

Music filled the air without musician.

Light illuminated the heavens without sun.

The seasons passed without destruction.

Rain nourished without flooding.

Fire warmed without burning.

Even time itself seemed gentle.

The devas gathered in joyful assemblies where generosity, poetry, music, and acts of kindness were celebrated continually.

Many contemplated beauty.

Many cultivated friendship.

Many reflected upon virtue.

Many honored Krishna with songs expressing gratitude for the peace they enjoyed.

To those newly reborn there after lifetimes of wholesome conduct, Goloka appeared to be the fulfillment of every aspiration.

Few imagined there could exist any state beyond it.

Fewer still questioned whether such happiness might one day pass away.

For suffering had become so subtle that it could scarcely be perceived.

The Blessed One understood that this subtlety made awakening all the more difficult.

Gross suffering often inspires inquiry.

Perfect comfort easily gives rise to complacency.

Thus even the highest pleasures may become veils concealing reality.

The Merit That Produced Krishna's Birth

Long before his birth in Goloka, Krishna had wandered through saṃsāra like every other sentient being.

He had known poverty and abundance.

Victory and defeat.

Pleasure and grief.

He had been born among kings who ruled with justice.

He had been born among hermits devoted to meditation.

He had been born as scholars seeking wisdom.

He had been born as physicians healing the sick.

He had been been merchants who gave generously.

He had been laborers whose honesty inspired entire communities.

He had cared for strangers.

Protected children.

Fed the hungry.

Sheltered refugees.

Comforted the dying.

Forgiven enemies.

Released resentment.

Offered his own possessions without expectation of reward.

Life after life, these wholesome actions accumulated vast stores of merit.

He delighted whenever others prospered.

He rejoiced in generosity.

He cherished friendship.

He inspired hope wherever he was born.

Although traces of ignorance remained, hatred rarely found a home within him.

His compassion became renowned throughout many worlds.

Eventually, through karma purified by immeasurable virtue, he was reborn as one of the highest devas.

His radiance exceeded that of those around him.

His wisdom surpassed that of many celestial kings.

His compassion drew beings naturally toward him.

His voice soothed anxiety.

His presence dissolved fear.

His blessings inspired countless beings to cultivate generosity and kindness.

As ages passed, devas willingly entrusted him with the guidance of Goloka.

Not through conquest.

Not through fear.

Not through force.

But because they recognized his extraordinary virtue.

Thus Krishna became lord of Goloka.

He governed with patience.

He punished no one.

He demanded little.

He encouraged music, friendship, generosity, and love.

Those who sincerely called upon him often experienced courage during hardship.

Those who remembered his compassion found strength to endure suffering.

Those who imitated his kindness generated wholesome karma.

In this, Krishna accomplished immeasurable good.

The Blessed One, seeing all this, rejoiced in Krishna's compassion.

Yet the Buddha also perceived what even Krishna himself did not yet see.

Merit can produce heavenly birth.

Compassion can inspire countless beings.

Miracles can astonish entire worlds.

Long life can resemble eternity.

Yet none of these, however magnificent, uproot ignorance by themselves.

Even the greatest deva remains within dependent origination until reality is known exactly as it is.

Looking upon Goloka with infinite kindness, the Buddha declared quietly to the assembly beside him:

"There dwells one whose heart is already inclined toward compassion.

Only one veil remains.

When that veil falls away, countless worlds shall benefit."

The Bodhisattvas joined their palms.

The devas listening from distant heavens became silent.

For they understood that the Compassionate One was preparing to teach not an ordinary being, but one whom innumerable worlds already revered.

Chapter 2 — The Great Deva Krishna

Extraordinary Powers

Thus the Blessed One continued to contemplate Goloka.

Among the countless devas dwelling within that radiant realm, none equaled Krishna in majesty.

His body shone with a blue radiance deeper than the midnight sky and brighter than polished sapphire. Around him appeared circles of golden light extending for hundreds of leagues. Wherever he walked, celestial lotuses blossomed beneath his feet—not because he willed them to appear, but because the

accumulated merit of innumerable lives naturally transformed the environment around him.

When Krishna spoke, every being heard the words in their own language.

To one who understood only birdsong, he spoke as birds sing.

To one who understood only the language of devas, he spoke as devas converse.

To sages he appeared as a sage.

To children he appeared as a loving companion.

To kings he appeared as a righteous ruler.

To ascetics he appeared as a humble mendicant.

To those burdened by grief he appeared as a comforting friend.

His forms were without number.

His manifestations were without limit.

To many, it seemed that Krishna was present in countless worlds simultaneously.

His mind perceived events unfolding across vast regions of the cosmos.

He remembered innumerable previous births.

He could behold the arising and passing of civilizations.

He understood the workings of karma to a degree that astonished even the devas.

If a drought afflicted a world, he could bring rain.

If a plague arose among celestial beings, he could alleviate its causes.

If conflict emerged among devas, his words restored harmony.

Many beings believed no power could equal his.

Others believed no wisdom could surpass his.

Still others proclaimed:

"Surely this is the Lord of all existence."

Krishna did not encourage such praise.

Yet neither did he reject it.

For in the depths of his own mind a subtle conviction had slowly matured through immeasurable ages.

"If every world depends upon my guidance...

If countless beings receive my blessings...

If I alone possess powers beyond measure...

Perhaps I truly am the highest."

This thought arose not through arrogance born of cruelty.

It arose through incomplete understanding.

Like a traveler who has climbed the highest mountain visible upon the horizon, Krishna sincerely believed there were no peaks beyond the one upon which he stood.

His compassion remained genuine.

His generosity remained immeasurable.

His patience remained unsurpassed.

Yet wisdom had not reached its fullest perfection.

Thus ignorance clothed itself in virtue.

The Blessed One perceived this with boundless compassion.

Compassionate Rule

Krishna never ruled Goloka through fear.

No decree issued from his palace demanding obedience.

No punishment awaited those who questioned him.

He delighted whenever beings cultivated kindness toward one another.

He instructed the devas to welcome strangers.

He encouraged forgiveness over revenge.

He praised generosity above wealth.

Whenever disputes arose, he listened before speaking.

Whenever sorrow appeared, he comforted rather than condemned.

His palace gates remained open day and night.

No petitioner was turned away.

The poor who attained rebirth in Goloka found themselves clothed in splendor.

The lonely found companions.

The frightened found peace.

Many devas asked Krishna why he accepted no tribute for himself.

He answered:

"What joy is there in receiving gifts from those already blessed?

Instead, let generosity circulate endlessly.

What one receives today, let another receive tomorrow."

Thus festivals of giving became common throughout Goloka.

Music celebrated compassion rather than conquest.

Art honored friendship rather than dominion.

Learning flourished.

Joy increased.

Even neighboring heavens admired the peace that filled Krishna's realm.

Because of these virtues, devotion toward Krishna spread far beyond Goloka itself.

Across innumerable worlds, beings called upon his name during hardship.

Many experienced courage.

Many found hope.

Many abandoned harmful actions after reflecting upon his example.

The merit produced by sincere devotion often brought fortunate rebirth.

Thus even the Buddha rejoiced in the wholesome karma inspired by Krishna's compassionate influence.

Yet the Buddha also understood that wholesome karma alone does not end saṃsāra.

Even compassion, unless united with perfect wisdom, remains conditioned.

The Seeds of Conceit

Conceit rarely appears all at once.

It grows as a vine grows upon an ancient tree.

At first it is scarcely noticed.

Later it becomes difficult to separate from the trunk itself.

So it was with Krishna.

When first the devas praised him, he answered,

"All goodness arises through virtue."

When they called him protector, he replied,

"I merely serve."

When they called him savior, he said,

"Let compassion be praised, not myself."

These words were sincere.

But ages passed.

The praises never ceased.

Every generation of devas honored him.

Entire civilizations regarded him as eternal.

Those reborn into Goloka knew no ruler before Krishna.

None remembered a beginning.

None imagined an ending.

Gradually another thought entered his mind.

"If every generation knows only me...

If no one recalls a time before my reign...

Perhaps there never was one."

He contemplated his own immeasurable lifespan.

He remembered countless previous births.

Yet beyond a certain point, memory faded into mystery.

Unable to perceive his own first beginning, he assumed there had been none.

Like one standing upon a vast ocean who cannot see the distant shore, he mistook the limits of perception for the limits of reality.

His miraculous powers reinforced this belief.

He could assume innumerable forms.

He could appear in dreams.

He could bless distant worlds.

He could reveal magnificent cosmic visions.

He could manifest forms so vast that galaxies seemed like dust motes within them.

The devas exclaimed,

"Who but the Supreme Lord could perform such wonders?"

Krishna reflected,

"Indeed... who else?"

Thus the smallest seed of conceit found fertile ground.

Not the conceit of cruelty.

Not the conceit of domination.

But the conceit of ultimate identity.

It became the final veil obscuring complete awakening.

Mistaking Long Life for Eternity

There is a danger known even among the heavens.

It is called the intoxication of longevity.

Human beings live briefly.

Therefore many remember death.

The devas of lower heavens live longer.

Therefore death seems distant.

The devas of the highest realms live for spans so vast that whole universes seem almost momentary by comparison.

To such beings, impermanence becomes exceedingly difficult to perceive.

Krishna watched stars form and dissolve.

He saw continents sink beneath oceans.

He witnessed species arise and disappear.

Kings became legends.

Legends became forgotten names.

Still he remained.

Each passing age appeared to confirm what countless devotees already proclaimed.

"I endure while all else changes."

Had Krishna possessed the Buddha's Perfect Knowledge, he would have seen that his own lifespan, though inconceivably vast, was nevertheless finite.

He would have seen the karma sustaining Goloka.

He would have seen the eventual exhaustion of those causes.

He would have seen the arising of future heavens beyond Goloka and the passing away of his own celestial kingdom.

But this knowledge remained hidden.

Thus Krishna sincerely concluded:

"I am the foundation beneath all changing things."

The Blessed One, contemplating this, spoke softly to the Bodhisattvas assembled around him:

"Power without hatred is admirable.

Compassion without selfishness is rare.

But wisdom alone cuts the final root of becoming.

Even the greatest deva mistakes the lamp for the sun if he has never seen the dawn."

Then the Buddha entered a profound samādhi known as **The Unshakable Contemplation of Boundless Compassion**.

From between his brows there emerged a ray of light that illuminated innumerable world systems.

Its radiance passed through heavens, human worlds, and celestial palaces without obstruction.

It came at last to the jeweled gates of Goloka.

The guardians of that radiant realm looked upon the light with wonder, for never before had they witnessed a brilliance greater than that of their own lord.

Within the innermost palace, Krishna opened his eyes.

For the first time in immeasurable ages, he perceived a light that did not originate from himself.

He rose slowly from his jeweled throne.

A quiet curiosity arose within his heart.

"What wisdom," he wondered, "shines beyond even Goloka?"

And so the turning of the Dharma toward Krishna quietly began.

Chapter 3 — How the Belief in Supreme Divinity Arose

Countless Devotees

Krishna rose from his jeweled throne and walked alone into the Gardens of Eternal Blossoms.

There the fragrance of celestial lotuses filled the air, and crystal streams reflected the stars of innumerable worlds. Yet his attention remained upon the mysterious light he had witnessed.

Never before had such radiance entered Goloka.

Never before had another's presence caused even a moment's uncertainty within his heart.

As he reflected, one of his attendants approached.

It was Nārada, foremost among the celestial messengers, whose travels carried him through countless heavens and human worlds.

He bowed respectfully.

"My Lord, your devotees have gathered."

Krishna smiled gently.

"Let them enter."

Soon the gardens filled with devas, sages, gandharvas, yakṣas, kings reborn through merit, and beings from worlds beyond number.

Some had journeyed for centuries merely to behold Krishna once.

Others had spent entire human lifetimes repeating his name with unwavering devotion before attaining birth in Goloka.

Still others had never seen him before, yet upon beholding his radiant form, tears flowed freely from their eyes.

One deva spoke first.

"My Lord, because I remembered your compassion during my final human breath, hatred disappeared from my heart. Through that wholesome karma I was born here."

Another said,

"When disease consumed my body, I prayed to you. Though my illness remained, fear vanished. I died peacefully."

Another declared,

"My family had been destroyed by war. Remembering your kindness prevented me from seeking revenge."

Others added,

"I abandoned greed."

"I forgave my enemies."

"I learned generosity."

"I found hope."

"I learned to love."

Every testimony gladdened Krishna's heart.

For he sincerely desired the welfare of every being.

He answered each one with humility.

"The goodness was always within you.

I merely reminded you of it."

The assembly rejoiced.

Yet among them there were also many who spoke differently.

One proclaimed,

"You are the Creator of all worlds."

Another declared,

"You alone existed before time."

Another said,

"You are the eternal Self dwelling within every being."

Still another cried,

"You alone are Reality itself."

The entire assembly echoed these praises.

"You are the Supreme!"

"You are the Beginning!"

"You are the End!"

"You are the source of all Buddhas, gods, and worlds!"

The praises continued like thunder.

Krishna listened in silence.

At first he intended to correct them.

But another thought quietly arose.

"So many wise beings cannot all be mistaken."

He remained silent.

His silence was understood as agreement.

Thus the devotion of countless beings slowly became the mirror through which Krishna began seeing himself.

Miracles and Their Limits

Thereafter many wonders occurred throughout the worlds.

When sincere devotees called upon Krishna with hearts filled by generosity and compassion, extraordinary events sometimes followed.

Storms unexpectedly ceased.

Children recovered from illness.

Hostile rulers experienced sudden remorse.

Famine gave way to rain.

Despair turned toward hope.

Many concluded that Krishna himself directly governed every event.

Yet the workings of karma are subtle.

The wholesome confidence inspired by devotion transformed minds.

Transformed minds produced wholesome actions.

Wholesome actions ripened into beneficial conditions.

Few perceived this chain of dependent origination.

Most saw only the miracle.

Even Krishna himself wondered.

"If merely remembering my name brings such blessings..."

"Perhaps all blessings truly originate from me."

He did not yet perceive that conditions arise together like threads woven into one cloth.

No single thread creates the garment.

Likewise no isolated cause creates any event.

The Buddha alone completely understood the limitless web of dependent origination extending throughout all worlds.

Krishna understood much.

The Buddha understood perfectly.

Yet Krishna had never encountered one possessing greater wisdom than himself.

Therefore he had no measure by which to perceive the limits of his own knowledge.

The Formation of the View "I Am the Highest"

As kalpas passed, Krishna's understanding gradually took form.

He reasoned within himself.

"I remember innumerable previous lives.

Others remember only a few."

"I perceive worlds beyond counting.

Others perceive only their own."

"I can manifest countless bodies.

Others cannot."

"My lifespan surpasses imagination.

Others perish quickly."

"My devotees experience blessings through remembering me."

"The devas themselves seek my counsel."

"If every sign points toward my supremacy...

Would it not be unreasonable to deny it?"

Thus he concluded:

"I am the Highest Lord."

Yet he did not imagine himself cruel.

Nor jealous.

Nor demanding.

Rather he believed the universe itself expressed his boundless compassion.

He regarded himself as the eternal protector of all beings.

He sincerely wished every creature to flourish.

For this reason his conviction became especially difficult to uproot.

Error joined with selfishness is easily recognized.

Error joined with compassion appears almost indistinguishable from truth.

Thus even great devas may remain within ignorance.

Ignorance Hidden Within Great Merit

There are two kinds of darkness.

One belongs to those who refuse goodness.

The other belongs to those whose goodness has not yet reached complete wisdom.

The first darkness delights in harming others.

The second sincerely desires the welfare of all beings while unknowingly mistaking the conditioned for the unconditioned.

Krishna belonged to the second.

His generosity was authentic.

His compassion was authentic.

His patience was authentic.

His loving-kindness was authentic.

Yet beneath these virtues remained one subtle assumption.

He believed there existed an eternal, independent Self who possessed these qualities.

He believed this Self was himself.

Because Goloka endured through immeasurable ages, he mistook duration for eternity.

Because his miracles exceeded those of other devas, he mistook extraordinary ability for omniscience.

Because innumerable beings loved him, he mistook universal devotion for ultimate confirmation.

Because no one around him possessed greater insight, no one could reveal his remaining ignorance.

Thus the final veil remained untouched.

The Bodhisattvas surrounding the Blessed One perceived all these things through the Buddha's samādhi.

One Bodhisattva asked,

"World-Honored One, Krishna possesses immeasurable compassion. Why has he not yet awakened?"

The Buddha replied,

"Because compassion without complete wisdom still grasps.

It grasps gently.

It grasps lovingly.

Yet it still grasps."

Another Bodhisattva asked,

"If his virtues are so vast, why has no Buddha previously instructed him?"

The Blessed One answered,

"The causes have now ripened.

Before today his confidence would have rejected instruction.

Today, for the first time in immeasurable ages, a question has arisen within his heart."

At that very moment, Krishna again contemplated the mysterious light that had entered Goloka.

For the first time since assuming lordship over the heavenly realm, certainty no longer filled his mind completely.

He spoke quietly to himself.

"If there exists a wisdom greater than my own, I wish to know it."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Excellent."

For in all the worlds there is no beginning of awakening more precious than sincere doubt concerning one's own conceit.

The ray of light expanded until it encompassed the whole of Goloka.

Celestial music became still.

The jeweled rivers ceased their flowing.

Every deva looked upward.

The heavens themselves seemed to bow.

Then, without crossing distance and without disturbing even a single flower, the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha appeared within Goloka.

No gate opened.

No pathway formed.

He simply stood beneath a flowering celestial tree as though he had always been there.

The radiance surrounding him neither competed with nor diminished the splendor of Goloka.

Rather, it revealed a peace deeper than beauty, a silence greater than music, and a wisdom beyond every miracle.

Seeing this, Krishna instinctively rose from his throne.

Without understanding why, he folded his palms together.

For the first time in immeasurable ages, he felt not superiority, but reverence.

Part II — Krishna Descends into the Human World

Chapter 4 — Birth Among Human Beings

Taking Human Form

Krishna bowed before the Blessed One.

Yet before either spoke, the Buddha raised his hand with a gesture of reassurance.

"Great Deva," said the Tathāgata, "before we speak of what is yet to be understood, let us first speak truthfully of what has already been."

Immediately the jeweled sky above Goloka became like a flawless mirror.

Within it appeared countless scenes from ages long past.

The devas watched in astonishment.

Krishna himself gazed silently.

The Buddha said,

"Behold your own history."

The visions unfolded.

There appeared the earth with its mountains, rivers, forests, kingdoms, and peoples.

An age of great turmoil had arisen.

Kings struggled for dominion.

Families were divided.

Teachers proclaimed many doctrines.

War spread throughout the land.

At that time, through the force of immeasurable wholesome karma and vast compassion, Krishna descended from Goloka and accepted birth among human beings.

The devas watching exclaimed,

"Our Lord entered the world!"

The Buddha nodded gently.

"Indeed."

"For the welfare of many."

Krishna watched his own human life unfold before him.

He saw his childhood.

He saw friendships.

He saw moments of laughter and sorrow.

He saw the burdens that accompany human existence.

Unlike the devas, human beings knew hunger.

They knew illness.

They knew uncertainty.

Each day reminded them that life was fragile.

Krishna reflected,

"How quickly that life passed."

The Buddha answered,

"Yet within its brevity lay opportunities unavailable even in heaven."

"For a human birth, though difficult, is among the most precious conditions for awakening."

The devas listened carefully.

Many had long regarded human existence as inferior.

Now they heard the Buddha praise it above heavenly pleasure.

The Age of Conflict

The vision continued.

The kingdoms of the earth became increasingly divided.

Old alliances collapsed.

Ambition overcame wisdom.

Pride overcame restraint.

Brother turned against brother.

Teacher against student.

Friend against friend.

The great conflict later remembered as the Kurukṣetra War approached.

Countless beings suffered inwardly long before weapons were drawn.

Fear consumed rulers.

Hatred spread among soldiers.

Families wept while their sons prepared for battle.

Krishna walked among them.

He sought to prevent violence where he could.

He negotiated peace.

He counseled forgiveness.

He encouraged restraint.

Many listened.

Many did not.

The momentum of countless causes and conditions had already matured.

The Buddha spoke to the assembly.

"Even great compassion cannot always prevent the ripening of karma."

"When many causes have converged over generations, even the wisest teacher may only lessen suffering rather than remove it entirely."

Krishna lowered his head.

"I remember."

"I wished for peace."

"But peace did not come."

The Buddha replied,

"Because no single being governs karma."

"Worlds unfold through immeasurable interdependent causes."

Meeting Arjuna

Then appeared the great battlefield.

Two vast armies faced one another.

Standards fluttered.

Conches sounded.

The earth trembled beneath thousands of chariots.

Among the warriors stood Arjuna.

His bow slipped from his hands.

His limbs weakened.

His heart became overwhelmed by grief.

Looking across the battlefield, he recognized teachers who had instructed him since childhood.

Friends with whom he had laughed.

Relatives who had shared his home.

Former companions now standing as enemies.

His mind became clouded.

He turned toward Krishna.

"What victory could justify this sorrow?"

"What kingdom could repay the death of those whom I love?"

"I would rather abandon everything than become the cause of such destruction."

Krishna remembered that moment clearly.

Compassion filled his heart.

He wished only to free Arjuna from despair.

The Buddha looked toward Krishna.

"Your intention was wholesome."

Krishna answered quietly,

"I desired only that he should not become paralyzed by fear."

The Blessed One nodded.

"And because your compassion was genuine, countless beings benefited from your words."

"Yet sincere compassion and perfect wisdom are not always identical."

Krishna remained silent.

Teaching According to Present Understanding

The vision slowed.

The Buddha invited Krishna to observe not only what he had said, but also the state of mind from which he had spoken.

"You taught according to what you then understood."

Krishna watched himself speaking with confidence.

He encouraged steadfastness.

He spoke of duty.

He taught detachment from selfish reward.

He praised disciplined action performed without clinging to personal gain.

He urged devotion, self-control, generosity, and courage.

The Buddha smiled.

"These teachings contained much goodness."

"They encouraged virtue."

"They restrained selfishness."

"They inspired countless beings toward ethical conduct."

Krishna's face brightened slightly.

"Then they were not entirely mistaken?"

The Buddha replied,

"No wholesome teaching is without benefit."

"But every teaching reflects the understanding of the one who gives it."

"Compassion may be complete while wisdom continues to mature."

The great assembly listened in profound silence.

The Buddha continued.

"You sincerely believed yourself to be the Highest Reality."

"So naturally your words reflected that understanding."

"You spoke according to your present realization."

"You did not knowingly deceive anyone."

Krishna closed his eyes.

At last he understood.

"My error was not intentional."

"It was born from ignorance."

"Just as ordinary beings mistake the body for the self..."

"I mistook my heavenly greatness for ultimate reality."

The Buddha answered,

"Exactly so."

"No blame is found in one who has not yet seen."

"But when seeing arises, truth must be followed wherever it leads."

The visions above Goloka slowly faded.

Only the battlefield remained visible.

Arjuna still stood before Krishna, awaiting instruction.

Krishna gazed upon his former self with deep compassion.

"I loved him."

"I wished to help him."

The Buddha replied,

"And that love shall not be discarded."

"It shall be purified."

"What was once devotion centered upon yourself shall become compassion embracing every sentient being."

Then the Blessed One extended one finger toward the vision.

"The time has now come," he said gently,

"to examine not only what you taught..."

"...but why you believed it."

Thus the devas prepared to hear the origins of the doctrines by which Krishna had once understood himself and the cosmos, so that each might be examined in the light of dependent origination, impermanence, emptiness, and Suchness.

Chapter 5 — The Dialogue on the Battlefield

Teaching According to Present Understanding

The Blessed One raised his hand.

The vision of Kurukṣetra became so vivid that the devas felt as though they themselves stood upon the plain.

Dust drifted through the air.

Conches echoed across the horizon.

Warriors waited in silence.

Arjuna's bow, Gāṇḍīva, rested upon the floor of the chariot.

His heart was overwhelmed.

Seeing fathers, grandfathers, teachers, cousins, and lifelong friends standing among the opposing armies, he cried,

"My limbs fail me.

My mouth has become dry.

My body trembles.

How can victory purchased with the blood of those I love ever become a blessing?

I desire neither kingdom nor pleasure if obtained through such suffering."

Krishna remembered every word.

He remembered the sorrow upon Arjuna's face.

He remembered the desperation that had seized his companion's mind.

Turning toward the Buddha, Krishna said,

"I feared that despair itself would consume him."

The Buddha answered,

"Compassion moved your heart."

"That compassion was genuine."

"It was never false."

Krishna watched himself place a reassuring hand upon Arjuna's shoulder.

Then his former voice spoke.

"Stand.

Do not be overcome by weakness.

Fulfill your duty without attachment to personal gain."

The Buddha paused the vision.

He addressed the great assembly.

"Observe carefully.

These words encouraged courage over despair.

Responsibility over paralysis.

Selfless action over selfish desire.

In these respects they produced wholesome fruit."

Many Bodhisattvas nodded.

Even the devas perceived wisdom within these teachings.

The Buddha continued,

"But every wholesome teaching must also be examined to determine whether any subtle attachment remains concealed within it."

The vision resumed.

Krishna continued speaking to Arjuna.

He taught discipline.

He taught generosity.

He taught mastery over desire.

He taught that selfish attachment produces suffering.

He urged Arjuna to perform actions without clinging to reward.

Again the Blessed One smiled.

"These teachings resemble many truths discovered by sages throughout the worlds."

"They lessen greed."

"They lessen fear."

"They encourage virtue."

"Therefore they have benefited countless beings."

Krishna bowed.

"I rejoice that some good resulted."

The Buddha replied,

"Goodness never disappears merely because greater wisdom later appears."

"A child who learns to walk imperfectly has nevertheless taken a true step."

"So too with spiritual understanding."

Duty, Devotion, and Action

The Buddha invited Krishna to continue watching.

Arjuna asked,

"If action binds us, why should I act at all?"

Krishna answered according to the understanding he possessed at that time.

"Perform every action as an offering unto me.

Act without selfish desire.

Then your actions shall not bind you."

The Blessed One allowed silence to settle before speaking.

"Great Deva, what moved you to teach this?"

Krishna reflected carefully.

"I observed that beings become imprisoned by craving."

"They cling to wealth."

"They cling to victory."

"They cling to praise."

"I believed that if their attachment shifted toward me, selfishness would gradually weaken."

The Buddha nodded approvingly.

"This was skillful to a degree."

"When attachment to selfish pleasure gives way to reverence for virtue, much wholesome karma is generated."

"But attachment has not yet completely ceased."

Krishna lowered his gaze.

"I now perceive this."

The Buddha continued,

"Attachment directed toward goodness is gentler than attachment directed toward greed."

"Yet liberation requires freedom even from subtle attachment."

The assembly listened intently.

The Blessed One continued,

"The mature practitioner acts neither for selfish reward nor because another being demands it."

"He acts because wisdom naturally expresses itself as compassion."

"Generosity gives because suffering exists."

"Compassion serves because beings suffer."

"No separate self stands behind these actions claiming ownership."

"They arise like rain nourishing every field without choosing favorites."

Krishna contemplated these words deeply.

The Vision of the Cosmic Form

The heavenly vision shifted.

Arjuna spoke again.

"If your words are true, reveal to me your true nature."

Then the scene transformed.

The sky dissolved.

The earth vanished.

The entire cosmos appeared within Krishna's immeasurable form.

Stars revolved like sparks.

Galaxies turned like wheels.

Mountains arose and disappeared.

Entire worlds emerged from radiant light.

Countless devas filled the heavens.

Time itself seemed to flow through Krishna's body.

The devas of Goloka smiled with recognition.

Many remembered hearing of this revelation.

The younger devas gasped in astonishment.

The vision surpassed imagination.

After a long silence the Buddha spoke.

"The manifestation was real."

Krishna looked surprised.

"It was?"

"It was."

"You truly possessed the meditative power to reveal a cosmic vision beyond ordinary perception."

The devas rejoiced.

Yet the Buddha continued.

"Nevertheless, what was shown requires correct understanding."

The immense vision remained suspended above them.

The Blessed One asked,

"Did this manifestation encompass every possible world system?"

Krishna examined the vision.

"No."

"Did it reveal the complete web of dependent origination extending throughout beginningless saṃsāra?"

"No."

"Did it include every Buddha-field?"

"No."

"Did it display Suchness itself?"

Krishna remained silent.

At last he answered,

"No."

The Buddha smiled kindly.

"Then what was revealed?"

Krishna reflected for a long time.

Finally he replied,

"It revealed the vastness of my own karmic realization."

"Not limitless reality itself."

The Buddha joined his palms.

"Excellent."

"Miraculous manifestations reveal the capacities of the one performing them."

"They do not by themselves establish omniscience."

"A great deva may display astonishing visions."

"A Bodhisattva may display still greater ones."

"A Buddha performs miracles when beneficial."

"But none of these miracles define Buddhahood."

"What defines a Buddha is perfect awakening to reality exactly as it is."

Many devas felt their pride diminish.

They realized that miraculous power and perfect wisdom were not identical.

The Sincerity of Krishna's Earlier Teaching

The vision of Kurukṣetra slowly faded.

Only Krishna and Arjuna remained visible.

The younger Krishna looked upon his companion with complete sincerity.

Every word arose from compassion.

Every instruction sought Arjuna's welfare.

No deception entered his heart.

The Blessed One turned toward the assembly.

"Understand this well."

"Error born from malice differs greatly from error born from incomplete understanding."

"Krishna did not seek worship through deceit."

"He spoke according to the highest realization then available to him."

"He believed what he taught."

"His intention remained compassionate."

Krishna bowed until his forehead touched the jeweled earth of Goloka.

"World-Honored One, I understand."

"My earlier teachings were not born from selfishness."

"They were limited by the horizon of my wisdom."

The Buddha answered,

"Precisely."

"Compassion brought you far."

"Wisdom shall now carry you beyond even the heavens."

The Blessed One then looked toward the countless devas assembled before him.

"In the next teaching we shall examine not merely the words that were spoken upon the battlefield, but the assumptions from which those words arose."

"For every doctrine, however noble, rests upon a particular understanding of reality."

"If the understanding matures, the doctrine likewise matures."

"And thus even a great deva continues to learn."

The entire assembly became still, awaiting the examination of the deepest convictions that Krishna had long held concerning himself and the nature of existence.

Chapter 6 — The Limits of Heavenly Knowledge

Why Even Great Devas Can Be Mistaken

A profound silence settled over Goloka.

The celestial music ceased.

The jeweled rivers flowed quietly.

Even the fragrant winds became still, as though the entire heavenly realm desired to hear the words that were about to be spoken.

Krishna remained seated before the Blessed One with folded hands.

His jeweled crown rested upon the ground beside him.

He no longer sat upon his throne.

Instead, he chose a simple lotus seat facing the Buddha.

The assembled devas watched with amazement.

Never before had they seen their lord place another before himself.

After a long silence, Krishna spoke.

"World-Honored One, I now understand that I am not eternal.

I understand that my realm is conditioned.

I understand that my lifespan, though beyond measure, shall one day end.

Yet one question remains.

How could I have been mistaken for so long?"

The Blessed One answered gently.

"Because seeing much is not the same as seeing completely."

Krishna listened attentively.

The Buddha continued.

"A traveler standing upon the highest mountain of a continent may believe he has seen the entire earth.

He has seen much.

But not everything.

Likewise, a great deva may behold countless worlds while still remaining unable to perceive the whole of dependent origination."

The Buddha reached toward the empty air.

A single drop of water appeared upon his fingertip.

"Great Deva, if a fish lived within this drop from birth until death, it might conclude,

'This is all water.'

Would the fish be lying?"

Krishna replied,

"No, Blessed One.

It would simply know only what it has experienced."

The Buddha smiled.

"So too with heavenly beings."

What Krishna Could See

The Buddha extended his right hand.

The space before the assembly became transparent.

Within it appeared innumerable world systems.

Some contained humans.

Some contained devas.

Others contained beings unlike any known in Goloka.

The vision stretched beyond number.

The Buddha asked,

"What do you perceive?"

Krishna answered confidently.

"I perceive countless universes.

I perceive devas, humans, nāgas, and celestial kings.

I perceive karmic streams extending through many lifetimes.

I perceive births and deaths occurring beyond calculation."

The Buddha nodded.

"You truly perceive these things."

No sooner had the words been spoken than another layer of reality appeared beyond the first.

The worlds Krishna had described became only a small portion of a vastly greater expanse.

Beyond them appeared further universes.

Beyond those, still more.

Each contained Buddhas teaching the Dharma.

Each contained Bodhisattvas guiding beings.

Each contained Pure Lands beyond ordinary imagination.

Krishna's expression changed.

"I... did not perceive these."

The Buddha replied,

"Yet they existed before you perceived them."

Krishna bowed his head.

"Yes."

The Blessed One continued.

"What else do you see?"

Krishna looked carefully.

"I see countless causes producing countless results."

Again the Buddha smiled.

Then yet another dimension unfolded.

Each event within every universe became connected to innumerable other events.

Every thought influenced countless beings.

Every action generated conditions extending across ages.

Nothing stood alone.

Nothing possessed independent existence.

The web of dependent origination extended beyond every conceivable boundary.

Krishna gazed in wonder.

"My knowledge has always followed individual streams."

"I have never perceived the entire ocean."

The Buddha answered,

"Exactly."

What Still Remained Hidden

The Blessed One then spoke.

"There are three limitations shared by even the greatest devas."

The assembly listened carefully.

"The first is the limitation of perspective."

"A deva may see farther than humans.

Yet farther is not the same as limitless."

"The second is the limitation of lifespan."

"A lifespan lasting billions of years easily appears eternal to one who cannot perceive its ending."

"The third is the limitation born of subtle conceit."

"When beings unconsciously assume,

'I have already reached the highest,'

the desire to inquire quietly disappears."

Krishna closed his eyes.

He remembered innumerable occasions when devas had praised him.

He remembered their declarations.

"You are eternal."

"You are supreme."

"You are beyond all."

He had accepted these words.

Not from pride.

But because he had never encountered anything greater.

He whispered,

"My ignorance was sustained by admiration."

The Buddha answered,

"As a clear lake reflects the moon, so the minds of your devotees reflected back the image they believed you to be."

"Seeing yourself continually through their eyes, you gradually accepted their understanding as your own."

Krishna sighed deeply.

"So even praise can become a fetter."

The Buddha replied,

"Especially praise."

"For criticism often inspires reflection.

Praise rarely does."

The devas lowered their heads.

Many recognized themselves in these words.

The Horizon of Knowledge

The Buddha continued.

"Great Deva, imagine a child born within a beautiful valley."

"The valley contains forests, rivers, and fertile fields."

"The child climbs its highest hill and sees everything within it."

"If someone tells him there are oceans beyond the mountains, he laughs."

"'Impossible,' he says.

'I have climbed the highest place.'"

The Buddha looked directly into Krishna's eyes.

"Has the child lied?"

"No."

"Has he seen much?"

"Yes."

"Has he mistaken the limits of his vision for the limits of reality?"

"Yes."

The Buddha gently placed his hand upon Krishna's shoulder.

"So it was with you."

"You ascended to one of the highest heavens."

"You attained immeasurable merit."

"You cultivated profound compassion."

"You acquired miraculous abilities beyond imagination."

"You climbed farther than almost any being within your world system."

"But because no greater summit had yet appeared before you...

...you concluded none existed."

Krishna felt tears gathering once again.

The words pierced his heart.

Not because they accused him.

But because they perfectly described his own experience.

The Lamp and the Sun

The Blessed One then pointed toward one of Goloka's radiant crystal lamps.

It illuminated the entire pavilion.

The Buddha asked,

"During the night, what appears brighter than this lamp?"

The devas answered,

"Nothing."

The Buddha continued,

"And when the sun rises?"

The devas smiled.

"The lamp still shines."

"But beside the sun its light scarcely appears."

The Buddha nodded.

"The lamp was never false."

"It simply was not the greatest light."

He turned kindly toward Krishna.

"So too with your wisdom."

"It illuminated innumerable worlds."

"It relieved immense suffering."

"It inspired compassion."

"It guided countless beings toward wholesome karma."

"It was never darkness."

"But when the light of complete awakening appeared..."

Krishna completed the sentence.

"...I understood that my wisdom, though genuine, was not yet perfect."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Excellent."

"No lamp need feel ashamed before the sun."

"For without lamps many travelers would never survive the night."

The assembled Bodhisattvas rejoiced.

Many devas wept openly.

For never had they heard humility explained with such compassion.

The Buddha then became silent.

The silence itself seemed to teach.

After a long time Krishna bowed until his head touched the jeweled earth.

"Blessed One," he said,

"I have seen the limits of my knowledge."

"But one question remains hidden within my heart."

"What belief caused all the others to arise?"

The Buddha looked upon him with boundless kindness.

"The belief," he said,

"that there exists an independent, permanent essence standing apart from causes and conditions."

"When that root is examined...

...every branch growing from it may also be understood."

Thus the Blessed One prepared to reveal the deepest cause of Krishna's former understanding, from which all subsequent views had naturally unfolded.

Part III — The Buddha Enters Goloka

Chapter 7 — The Compassion of the Tathāgata

Surveying the World Systems

The Blessed One remained silent after speaking of the root of all mistaken views.

No one in the great assembly dared interrupt.

Even the jeweled birds that sang among the celestial trees became still.

The silence itself became a teaching.

After a time, the Buddha spoke.

"Great Deva, before a physician prescribes medicine, he first understands the illness. Before a bridge is built, the river is carefully observed. Likewise, before examining any particular view, one must understand the conditions from which views arise."

Krishna bowed.

"Please teach me, Blessed One."

The Buddha entered a profound samādhi.

At once, the entire sky above Goloka became transparent.

The devas no longer saw merely their own heaven.

They saw innumerable world systems extending in every direction.

Some universes had only recently arisen.

Others approached dissolution.

Some contained Buddhas presently turning the Wheel of Dharma.

Others awaited the appearance of a Buddha in future ages.

There were worlds more beautiful than Goloka.

There were worlds consumed by violence.

There were realms where beings lived only moments.

There were heavens where beings lived for inconceivable kalpas.

Yet throughout every realm, one pattern remained unchanged.

Whatever arose through causes eventually changed.

Whatever changed eventually ceased.

Krishna observed carefully.

Previously he had seen countless worlds.

Now he perceived something he had never noticed.

No realm existed independently.

Every world influenced countless others.

Every action became a condition for further actions.

Every thought gave rise to further thoughts.

Nothing existed alone.

Nothing governed by itself.

Nothing possessed independent existence.

The Buddha asked,

"What do you now perceive?"

Krishna answered slowly,

"I once believed the worlds revolved around great beings."

"Now I see that even great beings arise within a web of immeasurable conditions."

The Buddha inclined his head.

"You begin to see dependent origination."

Why the Buddha Visited Goloka

One Bodhisattva rose from the assembly.

His robes shone with the quiet radiance of long-cultivated wisdom.

He bowed before the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One, throughout immeasurable world systems there remain countless beings immersed in suffering. Why did you first come to Goloka rather than to one of the lower realms?"

The Buddha replied,

"A single awakened heart within a place of great influence becomes a refuge for innumerable beings."

He turned toward Krishna.

"For countless ages this deva has inspired generosity."

"He has encouraged forgiveness."

"He has cultivated loving-kindness."

"His influence reaches worlds beyond counting."

"If such a one abandons the final veil of conceit,
immeasurable benefit follows."

The Buddha continued,

"I did not come because Krishna was the most sinful."

"I came because he was ready."

"The ripening of karma is subtle."

"When the soil is prepared, even a single seed produces a forest."

Krishna listened with tears in his eyes.

"Blessed One," he said softly,

"Had you come earlier, I would have defended my certainty."

The Buddha smiled.

"And had I come later, many more ages would have passed before this meeting."

"The Dharma is taught when causes and conditions mature."

The Assembly of the Devas

Word spread throughout Goloka more swiftly than light.

"The Buddha is teaching."

From every palace came celestial beings.

Kings of neighboring heavens arrived with their retinues.

Great sages descended from meditation.

Gandharvas ceased their music.

Nāgas emerged from jeweled lakes.

Even devas who had once proclaimed Krishna to be the Supreme Lord came to hear the teaching.

Many expected a contest.

They wondered,

"Will Krishna defend his greatness?"

"Will the Buddha challenge his authority?"

Instead they beheld something entirely different.

Krishna remained seated below the Buddha.

His palms were joined.

His expression reflected neither humiliation nor fear.

It reflected joy.

One young deva whispered,

"I have never seen our lord so peaceful."

Another answered,

"I have never seen him listen so completely."

The elder devas observed silently.

Some still struggled inwardly.

"If Krishna is not the Highest," they wondered, "what becomes of all we have believed?"

The Buddha, knowing their thoughts, addressed them without being asked.

"Do not fear the loss of truth."

"Fear only the refusal to examine it."

"If compassion is genuine, wisdom will not destroy it."

"If virtue is genuine, insight will not diminish it."

"When gold is placed within a refining fire, it does not become less precious."

"It becomes purer."

Krishna looked upon his devotees with immeasurable tenderness.

"My beloved friends," he said,

"If anything within me deserves your love, it is not diminished by truth."

"If my compassion is real, then wisdom can only deepen it."

"If my friendship is genuine, then I desire your awakening more than your admiration."

Many devas began to weep.

Not from sorrow.

But because they saw their lord becoming even greater through humility than he had ever appeared through majesty.

The Blessed One looked across the immeasurable assembly.

Then he spoke the words that would begin the deepest examination yet.

"Throughout countless ages, beings have asked:

'Who am I?'

'What is ultimate?'

'What endures forever?'

Some answer by clinging to the body.

Others to the mind.

Others to heavenly glory.

Others to subtle concepts.

But whatever is grasped becomes the beginning of another view."

He turned toward Krishna.

"Great Deva, the time has now come to examine not your virtues, which are many, nor your compassion, which is sincere, but the deepest assumption from which your former understanding arose."

Krishna bowed low.

"I am ready, Blessed One."

The Buddha replied,

"Then let us begin not by defending any doctrine, nor by rejecting any doctrine, but by looking directly at experience itself."

"Whatever is true need not fear investigation."

And the entire assembly—devas, Bodhisattvas, sages, and celestial kings—became perfectly still, awaiting the Buddha's examination of the deepest roots of clinging and the beginning of Krishna's direct realization of reality as it is.

Chapter 8 — "Are You Permanent?"

The Question

The Blessed One sat in perfect stillness.

No wind disturbed his robes.

No thought of victory or defeat entered his mind.

He had not come to conquer Krishna.

He had come to free him.

The great assembly waited.

After a long silence, the Buddha looked upon Krishna with eyes filled only with compassion.

"Great Deva," he said gently, "I shall ask only one question."

Krishna bowed.

"I shall answer truthfully."

The Buddha asked,

"Are you permanent?"

The question seemed almost too simple.

Many devas smiled among themselves.

"Surely our lord is permanent," they thought.

"Has he not ruled Goloka since before memory?"

Krishna himself answered without hesitation.

"My lifespan cannot be measured by human calculation."

"I have watched stars arise and disappear."

"I have seen kingdoms become dust."

"I have witnessed innumerable generations of devas."

"I remain while all around me changes."

The Buddha nodded.

"That is not what I asked."

Another silence followed.

Then the Buddha repeated,

"Are you permanent?"

This time Krishna did not answer immediately.

He searched his own experience.

"I have never seen my own end."

The Buddha replied,

"Not seeing an end is different from having none."

Krishna reflected.

"That is true."

The Buddha continued,

"Tell me, Great Deva.

Did you always possess your present body?"

"No."

"Did you always possess your present knowledge?"

"No."

"Did you always rule Goloka?"

"No."

"Then change has already occurred."

Krishna lowered his eyes.

"It has."

The Blessed One smiled gently.

"Then let us continue."

Universes Arising and Passing Away

The Buddha raised one finger.

Immediately the heavens opened.

No words were spoken.

No miracle was announced.

Reality itself became visible.

The assembly saw a universe being born.

Not from nothing.

Not through command.

But through innumerable conditions converging beyond calculation.

Galaxies formed.

Stars ignited.

Worlds cooled.

Oceans gathered.

Living beings appeared according to their karma.

Civilizations arose.

Languages developed.

Religions flourished.

Empires expanded.

Empires fell.

Mountains became seas.

Seas became deserts.

The stars themselves burned away.

Darkness spread.

The universe dissolved.

Then another appeared.

And another.

And another.

None resembled the last.

Some contained Buddhas.

Some did not.

Some possessed heavens unknown to Goloka.

Others contained realms no deva had imagined.

The visions continued beyond number.

The devas became overwhelmed.

Never had they witnessed such vastness.

Krishna whispered,

"I believed creation occurred once."

The Buddha answered,

"Conditioned existence neither begins absolutely nor ends absolutely."

"It continually unfolds according to causes and conditions."

The visions continued.

Countless kalpas passed like moments.

Heavens arose.

Heavens disappeared.

Even the greatest celestial kingdoms vanished when the karma sustaining them came to completion.

No exception appeared.

Seeing Goloka's Impermanence

Then the Blessed One spoke.

"Great Deva."

Krishna folded his palms.

"Look carefully."

The vision changed.

Goloka itself appeared.

Not as it existed now.

But as it had first arisen.

There was no jeweled city.

No celestial music.

No lotus lakes.

Only the gradual ripening of immeasurable wholesome karma.

Countless beings whose generosity, kindness, patience, and compassion matured together gave rise to corresponding conditions.

Those conditions gradually manifested Goloka.

Its rivers appeared.

Its forests appeared.

Its palaces appeared.

Finally Krishna himself was born there.

The entire assembly watched in silence.

Then the vision continued.

Ages passed.

Kalpas flowed onward.

The brilliance of Goloka slowly diminished.

Not suddenly.

Not violently.

Simply as causes supporting it gradually weakened.

The jeweled trees flowered less abundantly.

The celestial music became quieter.

The light filling the heavens softened.

Great devas completed their heavenly lifespans.

Some departed for fortunate rebirths.

Others descended once more into lower realms according to remaining karma.

Even Krishna's own palace became empty.

At last only quiet remained.

Then Goloka itself disappeared.

Not destroyed.

Not punished.

Simply exhausted.

Its conditions had ended.

The vision dissolved.

Silence filled the assembly.

Many devas wept.

Some trembled.

Others could scarcely believe what they had witnessed.

Krishna sat motionless.

He had seen the future.

Not as prophecy imposed by another.

But as the natural consequence of dependent origination.

After a long time he spoke.

"My realm..."

"...will one day cease."

The Buddha answered softly,

"Yes."

"My companions..."

"They too are impermanent."

"My body..."

"It also is conditioned."

"My throne..."

"A temporary arrangement."

"My glory..."

"A result of karma."

"My power..."

"Dependent upon causes."

"My identity..."

The Buddha waited.

Krishna searched deeply.

Finally he answered,

"...is also dependent upon causes."

The Blessed One inclined his head.

"Excellent."

The First Crack in Conceit

The entire assembly remained perfectly still.

For the first time since attaining birth in Goloka, Krishna examined himself without comparing himself to others.

He no longer asked,

"Am I greater?"

He asked,

"What am I?"

He examined his body.

It changed.

He examined his thoughts.

They arose and ceased.

He examined memory.

It appeared and disappeared.

He examined emotion.

It flowed like water.

He examined his miraculous abilities.

They depended upon concentration.

He examined his kingship.

It depended upon the confidence of others.

He examined Goloka.

It depended upon karma.

He searched for something existing independently.

He found nothing.

Yet one subtle attachment remained.

Though he now understood impermanence, he still wondered,

"If all these changing things depend upon causes...

Is there not somewhere an unchanging essence beneath them all?"

The Buddha, knowing the thought before it was spoken, looked upon Krishna with boundless kindness.

"You have seen that what is conditioned changes."

"Now we must examine the belief that behind changing things there exists an independent essence."

"For many seekers stop after recognizing impermanence."

"They do not yet investigate the one who claims,

'I am the one to whom these changes occur.'"

Krishna bowed deeply.

"I understand."

"My investigation has only begun."

The Buddha replied,

"Indeed."

"When the search for an independent essence is completed, wisdom becomes unshakable."

The devas looked upon Krishna.

Never had their lord appeared so luminous.

Not because his body had changed.

But because certainty had begun giving way to direct inquiry.

And the Blessed One knew that once sincere investigation had begun, awakening was no longer far away.

Chapter 9 — Reality as It Truly Is

Impermanence

The Blessed One allowed the vision of Goloka's arising and passing away to fade.

Nothing remained before the assembly except the quiet brilliance of the present moment.

No one spoke.

Even the devas who had once proclaimed Krishna to be eternal now sat in thoughtful silence.

The Buddha addressed Krishna gently.

"Great Deva, you have seen that all conditioned things change."

Krishna bowed.

"I have seen it clearly."

The Buddha continued,

"Tell me, does your body remain exactly the same from one moment to the next?"

"No."

"Does your mind remain exactly the same?"

"No."

"Do thoughts remain?"

"They arise and disappear."

"Do feelings remain?"

"They too arise and disappear."

"Does joy remain?"

"No."

"Does sorrow remain?"

"No."

"Do heavenly pleasures remain?"

"No."

"Does meditation remain?"

"No."

"Does concentration remain?"

"No."

The Buddha smiled.

"Then tell me, what among conditioned things escapes impermanence?"

Krishna searched carefully.

He examined every experience available to him.

His immeasurable memory.

His celestial body.

His miraculous powers.

His wisdom.

His compassion.

His throne.

His kingdom.

His devotees.

His very identity as Lord of Goloka.

Each depended upon changing conditions.

Finally he answered,

"I find nothing."

The Blessed One said,

"Excellent."

"Impermanence is not a punishment."

"It is simply the nature of conditioned existence."

"When one struggles against impermanence, suffering arises."

"When one understands impermanence, attachment begins to loosen."

Krishna reflected deeply.

"For countless ages I sought permanence within changing things."

"No wonder certainty always escaped me."

The Buddha inclined his head.

"Thus the wise do not seek permanence where none exists."

Dependent Origination

The Blessed One drew a circle upon the jeweled ground.

It contained neither beginning nor end.

He asked,

"Great Deva, from where does a flower come?"

"From a seed."

"And the seed?"

"From another flower."

"And the flower requires?"

"Soil."

"Rain?"

"Yes."

"Sunlight?"

"Yes."

"Time?"

"Yes."

"Space?"

"Yes."

The Buddha continued,

"If any one of these conditions were absent, would the flower appear?"

"It would not."

"Then which one alone is the flower?"

Krishna remained silent.

"The seed?"

"No."

"The rain?"

"No."

"The sunlight?"

"No."

"The earth?"

"No."

"The seasons?"

"No."

"The Buddha erased the circle with his hand.

"Yet without all of them together, no flower appears."

Krishna's eyes widened.

"So existence is neither independent nor nonexistent."

"It is conditioned."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Exactly."

"Whatever arises does so through dependence."

"Whatever depends cannot exist entirely by itself."

"And because it depends, it changes."

The assembly listened in profound stillness.

The Buddha continued,

"So too with kingdoms."

"So too with heavens."

"So too with devas."

"So too with Buddhas appearing within the world."

"So too with every thought."

"So too with every moment."

Krishna contemplated Goloka.

"It too depends."

"It does."

"My rule depends."

"It does."

"My wisdom depends upon causes."

"It does."

"My compassion itself..."

"...has matured through countless conditions."

Krishna folded his palms.

"I once believed my greatness belonged to me."

"Now I see it belongs to immeasurable causes extending beyond imagination."

The Buddha replied,

"Not even 'belongs.'

It simply arises."

Emptiness

The younger devas whispered among themselves.

One asked,

"If everything depends upon causes, does that mean nothing exists?"

The Buddha heard him and answered kindly.

"No."

"Emptiness does not mean nothing exists."

"It means nothing exists independently."

The Blessed One picked up a jeweled chariot carved from crystal.

He placed it before the assembly.

"What is this?"

"A chariot," replied the devas.

The Buddha removed its wheels.

"Is this the chariot?"

"No."

He removed the axle.

"The chariot?"

"No."

He removed the frame.

"The chariot?"

"No."

Soon every part lay separated upon the ground.

The Buddha asked,

"Where has the chariot gone?"

No one answered.

Krishna spoke thoughtfully.

"The name referred to the assembled parts."

"It was never an independent thing apart from them."

The Buddha nodded.

"Very good."

"So too with a palace."

"So too with a forest."

"So too with Goloka."

"So too with Krishna."

The words entered Krishna's heart like cool rain.

He looked inward.

His body consisted of parts.

His thoughts consisted of moments.

His memories consisted of conditions.

His identity consisted of relationships.

There was no separate, independent Krishna standing behind them.

Yet neither had he disappeared.

He laughed softly.

"I have spent ages searching for someone who was never there."

The Buddha laughed gently with him.

"Many beings do."

Non-Self

The Blessed One then asked,

"Great Deva, when you say 'I,' to what do you refer?"

Krishna answered,

"My body?"

"It changes."

"My mind?"

"It changes."

"My memories?"

"They change."

"My personality?"

"It has changed across countless lives."

"My kingship?"

"It depends upon Goloka."

"My name?"

"It was given."

"My powers?"

"They arose through karma."

The Buddha remained silent.

Krishna continued searching.

Finally he looked up.

"I cannot find an independent self."

The Blessed One replied,

"Neither could I."

"When awakening occurred beneath the Bodhi Tree, no eternal self was discovered."

"What was discovered was freedom from the need to invent one."

The assembly remained perfectly still.

The Buddha continued,

"When there is no fixed self to defend..."

"Pride loses its foundation."

"When there is no fixed self to glorify..."

"Conceit disappears."

"When there is no fixed self separate from others..."

"Compassion naturally becomes limitless."

Krishna felt as though a great burden had fallen from his shoulders.

For countless ages he had struggled to uphold an identity worthy of universal devotion.

Now he saw that nothing needed defending.

Nothing needed proving.

Nothing needed preserving beyond the compassionate activity arising from wisdom itself.

The End of Conceit

The Blessed One asked one final question.

"Great Deva."

"Yes, Blessed One."

"Who has awakened?"

Krishna closed his eyes.

Formerly he would have answered,

"I have awakened."

Now no words appeared.

Only understanding.

After a long silence he smiled.

"Wisdom has arisen."

The Buddha's face shone with quiet joy.

"Excellent."

"There is awakening."

"But no independent owner of awakening."

"There is compassion."

"But no possessor of compassion."

"There is wisdom."

"But no separate being who can claim it."

At that very moment, the final root of Krishna's conceit was cut.

Not by force.

Not by argument.

But by direct seeing.

He no longer thought,

"I am the Supreme."

Nor even,

"I am merely another being."

Both views had fallen away.

There remained only boundless gratitude.

Tears flowed freely down his face.

He rose from his lotus seat.

Approached the Blessed One.

Then, before devas, Bodhisattvas, celestial kings, sages, and beings from innumerable worlds, Krishna placed his forehead upon the Buddha's feet.

His voice trembled.

"Blessed One..."

"For immeasurable ages I accepted the reverence of worlds while still veiled by subtle ignorance."

"I never intended to mislead."

"Yet because I had not fully seen reality, I mistook the summit of conditioned existence for the unconditioned."

"Today the veil has fallen."

"I ask neither for forgiveness nor for honor."

"I ask only to learn how best to benefit those who have trusted me."

The Blessed One gently lifted Krishna to his feet.

He embraced him as a teacher embraces a beloved disciple.

Then he said,

"Great Deva, one who abandons conceit in a single moment surpasses one who clings to heavenly glory for countless kalpas."

"The path before you is no longer the path of a celestial king."

"It is the path of a Bodhisattva."

At these words, the heavens trembled.

Lotuses rained from the sky.

Throughout innumerable world systems, countless beings experienced a sudden stirring of compassion without knowing why.

For the awakening of one great heart had become the cause for the awakening of many others.

Part IV — Krishna's Great Repentance

Chapter 10 — Tears Before the Buddha

Confession

When the heavens had grown quiet once more, Krishna remained standing before the Blessed One.

The jeweled crown that had rested upon his brow lay forgotten upon the lotus floor.

No one dared replace it.

The devas looked not upon a defeated king, but upon one whose greatness had become deeper than majesty itself.

For the first time since his birth in Goloka, Krishna spoke without even the slightest trace of self-reference.

He bowed low before the Buddha and said,

"Blessed One, before this day I believed that I knew reality.

Now I see that I knew only a portion.

I mistook the highest heaven I had ever known for the highest truth.

I mistook immeasurable compassion for perfect wisdom.

I mistook extraordinary powers for complete understanding.

I mistook a long lifespan for permanence.

I mistook the devotion of countless beings for confirmation of my own conclusions.

None of these errors were born from malice.

Yet they remained errors."

The Buddha listened without interruption.

Krishna continued.

"Countless beings trusted my words.

Many cultivated generosity because of me.

Many abandoned hatred.

Many learned kindness.

For these wholesome fruits I rejoice.

Yet others came to believe that I myself was the unconditioned reality.

Because I believed this also, I never corrected them.

Though my intention was compassionate, my understanding remained incomplete."

His voice trembled.

"If even one being delayed awakening because of my ignorance...

...how shall I repay such a debt?"

The Blessed One answered,

"By awakening."

"No greater repayment exists."

Humility

Krishna looked toward the immeasurable assembly.

He recognized faces he had known for kalpas.

Some had praised him for millions of years.

Some had composed hymns declaring him eternal.

Others had traveled across worlds simply to see him once.

He loved every one of them.

That love had not diminished.

It had become immeasurably greater.

He addressed them.

"My beloved friends...

Do not grieve.

Nothing wholesome has been lost today.

Compassion has not been diminished.

Kindness has not been diminished.

Friendship has not been diminished.

Only ignorance has been diminished."

The devas wept.

Many feared that their lord would abandon them.

Krishna perceived their thoughts.

He smiled gently.

"I shall not abandon you.

But I can no longer permit you to cling to me."

"You have loved me sincerely.

Now allow that love to become wider than my own name."

"If you love Krishna...

Then love every frightened child.

Love every hungry being.

Love every lonely heart.

Love every creature that fears death.

If your devotion does not become compassion for all beings...

Then you have not truly understood me."

Many devas felt as though their hearts had broken open.

The attachment they had called devotion slowly transformed into boundless loving-kindness.

The Blessed One watched in silence.

He knew that this transformation was itself the flowering of the Dharma.

Bowing Before Perfect Wisdom

Krishna then turned once more toward the Buddha.

He knelt.

Placing both palms together, he declared before all assembled worlds,

"From this day forward I proclaim openly what I did not previously understand."

"No conditioned being is the Ultimate Reality."

"No heavenly realm is final liberation."

"No miraculous power establishes omniscience."

"No length of life abolishes impermanence."

"No praise from others creates truth."

He lifted his eyes toward the Buddha.

"You, Blessed One, revealed what I could not discover despite immeasurable ages."

"You entered my realm not to conquer me...

...but to free me."

"I therefore honor you as my teacher."

The devas watched with astonishment.

Never before had Krishna addressed another in this way.

He continued,

"I possessed greater power than countless devas.

Yet you possess greater wisdom than all miraculous powers."

"I possessed countless devotees.

Yet you possess perfect understanding."

"I ruled a heavenly kingdom.

You have gone beyond every kingdom."

"I inspired love.

You revealed the freedom in which love becomes limitless."

The Blessed One replied,

"Great Deva...

The teacher rejoices only because the student has seen."

"I claim nothing."

"The Dharma claims nothing."

"Reality simply is."

The Buddha Speaks on Repentance

One young deva asked,

"World-Honored One, has Krishna committed a great offense?"

The Buddha answered,

"No."

The deva looked puzzled.

"But he taught what he now recognizes as incomplete."

The Blessed One nodded.

"He taught sincerely."

"He spoke according to the understanding available to him."

"There is a great difference between deliberate deception and incomplete realization."

"If a traveler gives directions according to the road he himself has walked, he has not lied merely because another road extends farther."

"The fault lies only in refusing to continue walking after discovering the farther path."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"I shall continue walking."

The Buddha smiled.

"And therefore no fault remains."

Another Bodhisattva asked,

"Blessed One, what is true repentance?"

The Buddha answered,

"True repentance is not endless regret."

"It is the complete abandonment of the ignorance that produced the action."

"When ignorance disappears...

...the future itself changes."

The Crown Laid Aside

At that moment Krishna rose.

He walked toward the jeweled throne of Goloka.

The devas wondered what he intended.

He lifted the radiant crown with both hands.

It shone brighter than a thousand suns.

For countless ages it had symbolized his authority.

Slowly he returned before the Blessed One.

Then, to the astonishment of the entire assembly, Krishna placed the crown upon the empty lotus seat beside the Buddha rather than upon his own head.

He spoke quietly.

"This crown once reminded me that others looked to me."

"Now let it remind me that I must first look to the Dharma."

"I shall govern no longer as one believed to be supreme."

"I shall govern only as a servant of awakening."

The Blessed One did not touch the crown.

Instead he said,

"Keep it."

Krishna looked surprised.

The Buddha continued,

"External symbols are neither pure nor impure."

"What matters is the mind that wears them."

"If you wear the crown with conceit, it binds you."

"If you wear it with compassion, it becomes a means of serving others."

Krishna understood.

He lifted the crown once more.

But when he placed it upon his head, it no longer seemed the ornament of a supreme ruler.

It had become the humble responsibility of a Bodhisattva.

The entire assembly perceived the change.

Nothing outward had altered.

Everything inward had.

The Blessed One then looked toward the immeasurable multitude gathered throughout Goloka.

"The transformation of one heart," he said,

"has become the transformation of an entire heaven."

"And now..."

He turned toward Krishna.

"...the work truly begins."

For the Buddha knew that awakening, though complete in realization, expresses itself endlessly through compassionate activity.

Krishna, now free from the conceit of supremacy, prepared to undertake the greatest task of his immeasurable existence:

To return to those who loved him...

...and teach them the Dharma with perfect humility.

Chapter 11 — The Bodhisattva Vow

Renouncing Claims of Supremacy

After the Blessed One had spoken, Krishna stood before the immeasurable assembly of devas, celestial sages, Bodhisattvas, and beings gathered from countless worlds.

No music sounded.

No hymns were sung.

The silence itself honored the moment.

Krishna folded his palms before the Buddha and spoke.

"For immeasurable kalpas I desired the welfare of all beings.

Yet I believed that I myself was the highest refuge.

Today that belief has fallen away.

Therefore, before Buddhas throughout the ten directions, before the noble Bodhisattvas, before the devas of every heaven, and before every sentient being who has ever placed confidence in me, I renounce every claim to ultimate supremacy."

The heavens trembled gently.

No voice protested.

No deity objected.

Only stillness remained.

Krishna continued,

"I am not the creator of dependent origination.

I do not stand outside causes and conditions.

I do not possess an eternal, independent essence.

I am not beyond impermanence.

I am not beyond the Dharma.

Like every being, I have wandered through beginningless saṃsāra.

Like every being, I awakened only because wisdom arose through causes and conditions."

He turned toward the Buddha.

"Blessed One, before today I believed beings found liberation through me.

Now I understand that whatever liberation they attained arose through their own direct realization of the Dharma."

The Buddha replied,

"Excellent, Great Deva.

One who points away from himself and toward reality has become a true guide."

Infinite Compassion

Krishna looked across the innumerable faces gathered before him.

He saw human kings who had been reborn through wholesome karma.

He saw humble farmers.

Former monks.

Merchants.

Children.

Animals now reborn as devas.

Countless beings whose lives had been touched by devotion.

His heart overflowed with love.

Yet that love no longer sought to gather beings around himself.

Instead it flowed outward equally toward all existence.

He understood what the Buddha had revealed.

When there is no fixed self to defend...

love no longer has boundaries.

He spoke.

"My beloved friends...

Formerly I wished you to dwell with me in Goloka.

Now I wish something far greater.

I wish that every one of you awaken completely."

"If some of you are reborn in Goloka, I shall rejoice.

If some of you attain birth in the Pure Land of Abhirati, I shall rejoice.

If some awaken in human form, I shall rejoice.

If some become disciples of Buddhas unknown even to me, I shall rejoice.

For compassion does not seek followers.

Compassion seeks freedom."

Many devas wept openly.

Their devotion changed before their own eyes.

No longer did they desire merely to remain forever near Krishna.

They desired awakening for every living being.

The Buddha smiled.

"This is the flowering of Bodhicitta."

The Great Aspiration

Krishna knelt once more before the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One," he said,

"I ask permission to undertake the Bodhisattva Path."

The Buddha answered,

"No Buddha grants permission.

The vow itself is permission."

Krishna bowed deeply.

Then, before the immeasurable assembly, he placed his right knee upon the jeweled earth and made his vow.

"Hear me, Buddhas throughout the ten directions.

Hear me, noble Bodhisattvas.

Hear me, devas, humans, nāgas, animals, hungry ghosts, and beings dwelling in every realm of existence.

From this day until the end of suffering itself, I abandon every aspiration for heavenly supremacy.

I shall not seek worship.

I shall not seek dominion.

I shall not seek praise.

I shall not seek the reputation of being ultimate.

Instead I dedicate every merit accumulated throughout immeasurable kalpas to the awakening of all sentient beings.

Where there is fear, may I become courage.

Where there is hatred, may I become reconciliation.

Where there is loneliness, may I become friendship.

Where there is despair, may I become hope.

Where there is ignorance, may I become a condition leading toward wisdom.

May every act of kindness performed in my name become a cause for awakening rather than attachment.

May every hymn become compassion.

May every offering become generosity toward the suffering.

May every remembrance of me become remembrance of impermanence.

May every expression of devotion mature into Bodhicitta.

Until every hell is emptied...

Until every hungry ghost is satisfied...

Until every frightened animal finds peace...

Until every human being has encountered the Dharma...

Until every deva has abandoned conceit...

Until all Buddhas rejoice in the liberation of every sentient being...

I shall continue walking the Bodhisattva Path."

As the final words were spoken, an immeasurable light arose—not from Krishna alone, nor from the Buddha alone.

It appeared throughout the entire assembly simultaneously.

The Bodhisattvas smiled knowingly.

For they recognized that true Bodhicitta does not belong to one individual.

It manifests wherever wisdom and compassion become inseparable.

The Blessed One then addressed Krishna.

"Great Deva."

"Yes, Blessed One."

"You once inspired beings through love."

"Now you shall inspire them through humility."

"You once led them toward heavenly happiness."

"Now you shall lead them beyond heaven itself."

"You once believed yourself to be the destination."

"Now you have become a fellow traveler."

Krishna bowed.

"There is no greater joy."

The Buddha raised his hand in blessing.

"Then arise, Krishna Bodhisattva."

At those words, the entire assembly instinctively joined their palms.

Not because Krishna had become supreme.

But because he had become truly humble.

And from that humility arose a compassion deeper than even the splendor of Goloka itself.

Part V — Revisiting the Earlier Teachings

Chapter 12 — Speaking Again to Arjuna

Returning in Vision

After Krishna had completed the Bodhisattva Vow, the Blessed One remained seated in serene silence.

Then he spoke.

"Great Bodhisattva, compassion naturally wishes to return wherever misunderstanding remains."

Krishna bowed.

"My first thought after awakening has been of Arjuna."

The Buddha smiled.

"And why Arjuna?"

"Because through him countless generations came to know my earlier teachings."

"And what do you now wish to give him?"

Krishna answered without hesitation.

"Not another doctrine."

"But clearer vision."

The Blessed One raised his hand.

Immediately the jeweled heavens of Goloka dissolved into a vast expanse of luminous clarity.

Within that expanse appeared once again the plain of Kurukṣetra.

Yet the battlefield was no longer filled with armies.

Its noise had faded.

Time itself seemed suspended.

Only Krishna and Arjuna remained beside the chariot beneath an open sky.

Arjuna looked exactly as he had on that day long ago.

Yet this was not the past.

Nor was it a dream.

It was a vision in which wisdom could revisit compassion.

The Buddha spoke.

"This meeting changes no history."

"It illuminates understanding."

Krishna joined his palms.

"I understand."

He approached Arjuna.

His old friend looked upon him with joy.

"My beloved companion," said Arjuna, "your face shines differently."

Krishna smiled gently.

"It is because I have continued learning."

A New Dialogue

Arjuna looked puzzled.

"You, learning?"

"Were you not already complete?"

Krishna answered,

"I believed so."

"But believing oneself complete is often the final lesson still awaiting completion."

Arjuna remained silent.

Krishna continued.

"Long ago I taught you according to the understanding I possessed."

"I encouraged courage."

"I taught selfless action."

"I urged discipline."

"I spoke against selfish attachment."

"None of these should be abandoned."

Arjuna nodded.

"They have guided countless lives."

"They have indeed."

"But today I would begin differently."

Arjuna asked,

"How?"

Krishna looked toward the empty battlefield.

"When you feared killing those you loved, you suffered because your heart possessed compassion."

"I wished to remove your despair."

"Today I would first help you understand the nature of suffering itself."

The Blessed One listened silently.

Krishna continued.

"Suffering does not arise merely because painful events occur."

"It arises because the mind clings."

"It clings to permanence."

"It clings to identity."

"It clings to certainty."

"It clings to possession."

"When these are examined carefully, wisdom begins."

Arjuna reflected deeply.

"So courage without wisdom remains incomplete?"

Krishna nodded.

"Yes."

"And wisdom without compassion also remains incomplete."

Correcting Earlier Misunderstandings

Arjuna asked,

"My friend, when I looked upon your universal form, I believed I was seeing ultimate reality itself."

Krishna answered with great gentleness.

"You truly witnessed a manifestation beyond ordinary comprehension."

"It was not false."

"But I myself misunderstood its full significance."

Arjuna looked surprised.

"You misunderstood your own revelation?"

"I did."

"I believed that because my realization surpassed that of those around me, nothing greater existed."

"But there are countless Buddhas throughout immeasurable world systems."

"There are Bodhisattvas whose compassion embraces universes."

"There are Pure Lands whose purity exceeds even Goloka."

"There are truths no miracle alone can reveal."

Arjuna listened with folded hands.

Krishna continued.

"My vision demonstrated the vastness of conditioned existence."

"It did not reveal the entirety of reality."

The Blessed One then addressed Arjuna directly.

"A mirror may faithfully reflect the moon."

"It does not become the moon."

"So too a magnificent spiritual vision may reveal profound truth."

"It should never become an object of attachment."

Arjuna bowed before the Buddha.

"I understand."

The Heart of Devotion

Arjuna then asked the question that had remained within his heart for ages.

"My beloved friend...

Should I no longer love you?"

Krishna's expression became filled with warmth.

"Love that is rooted in gratitude never needs to be abandoned."

"But let your love become wider."

"When you see kindness in another being, love that."

"When you see wisdom, rejoice."

"When you see suffering, let your heart respond."

"If remembering me opens your heart to compassion, remember me."

"If chanting my name helps you cultivate generosity, chant."

"If reflecting upon our friendship inspires patience, continue."

"But do not imagine that awakening belongs to me."

"It belongs to no one."

"It is realized through directly seeing reality."

Arjuna's eyes filled with tears.

"I loved you because you gave me courage."

Krishna gently embraced him.

"Then let that courage now become compassion for every being."

The Buddha added,

"True devotion does not imprison the heart."

"It opens it."

"Whatever genuinely opens the heart toward wisdom, ethical conduct, and compassion becomes a wholesome condition."

"Whatever narrows the heart into attachment, superiority, or exclusion should be carefully examined."

Arjuna bowed before both teachers.

The Friend Who Walks Beside

The vision slowly began to dissolve.

Before it faded completely, Arjuna spoke one final time.

"My friend...

How should future generations remember you?"

Krishna smiled.

"Do not remember me as one who stood above the Dharma."

"Remember me as one who rejoiced upon discovering it."

"Do not remember me as the destination."

"Remember me as a fellow traveler who once mistook the summit of a mountain for the summit of reality."

"And remember this above all:

No matter how far one has journeyed...

No matter how great one's wisdom...

No matter how many worlds one has guided...

There is never shame in learning.

There is only freedom."

The vision disappeared.

Goloka once again surrounded the assembly.

Many devas who had heard the exchange quietly wept.

The Blessed One looked upon Krishna with deep approval.

"Great Bodhisattva," he said,

"You have done what only humility can accomplish."

Krishna bowed.

"What remains to be understood, Blessed One?"

The Buddha answered,

"The views by which beings describe ultimate reality."

"For words can guide toward awakening...

or become subtle objects of attachment."

Thus the assembly prepared to examine, one by one, the deepest concepts by which countless beings sought to express the highest truth, so that they might distinguish conceptual designation from direct realization of Suchness.

Chapter 13 — Reconsidering Īśvara

The Meaning of Lordship

When the assembly had settled once more, Krishna rose and addressed the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One, throughout countless ages many have called me Īśvara, the Supreme Lord. I myself accepted that

understanding, believing it to be true. Now I ask you, what is true lordship?"

The Buddha replied,

"Great Bodhisattva, before answering, let us first ask another question."

"What makes one a lord?"

Krishna reflected.

"One who protects."

"One who guides."

"One who governs wisely."

"One who cares for others."

The Buddha nodded.

"These are wholesome qualities."

"But tell me, does one who protects thereby become permanent?"

"No."

"Does one who guides thereby become unconditioned?"

"No."

"Does one who governs wisely thereby transcend dependent origination?"

"No."

The Buddha smiled.

"Then lordship is a function."

"It is not an eternal essence."

The devas listened attentively.

The Buddha continued,

"In countless worlds there are compassionate rulers."

"There are kings."

"There are queens."

"There are devas."

"There are Bodhisattvas."

"There are even Buddhas who compassionately guide beings."

"But guidance itself does not establish an independent, permanent self."

"A title describes a relationship."

"It does not reveal ultimate reality."

Krishna bowed.

"So I mistook a relationship for an absolute."

"You did."

Devas and Their Limitations

The Blessed One turned toward the assembled devas.

"You who dwell in heavenly realms, answer me."

"When hunger no longer troubles you, are you therefore beyond karma?"

The devas answered,

"No, Blessed One."

"When sickness no longer afflicts your bodies, are you beyond impermanence?"

"No."

"When your lives endure for immeasurable ages, are you therefore eternal?"

"No."

"When your powers surpass those of humanity, have you thereby transcended dependent origination?"

Again they answered,

"No."

The Buddha then looked toward Krishna.

"Great Bodhisattva, your former greatness exceeded theirs."

"It did."

"Your compassion exceeded theirs."

"It did."

"Your wisdom exceeded theirs."

"It did."

"But did superiority within saṃsāra remove you from saṃsāra?"

Krishna answered,

"It did not."

The Buddha continued,

"A mountain may be the tallest upon the earth."

"Yet it remains part of the earth."

"So too the highest deva remains within conditioned existence until ignorance has completely ceased."

Krishna smiled gently.

"I once believed I stood above the mountain."

"Now I see I was standing upon it."

The Illusion of Independence

The Blessed One drew a great circle in the jeweled earth.

Within it he drew countless smaller circles connected by lines extending in every direction.

"What do you see?"

Krishna answered,

"A network."

The Buddha replied,

"So too is existence."

"No being stands alone."

"No mind stands alone."

"No world stands alone."

"No heaven stands alone."

He pointed toward Krishna.

"Great Bodhisattva, your compassion matured because others showed compassion to you."

Krishna nodded.

"My wisdom matured because I learned from countless teachers."

"Yes."

"Your heavenly birth matured because of immeasurable wholesome actions."

"Yes."

"Your present awakening matured because causes and conditions brought us together."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"Without those causes, this awakening would not have occurred."

The Buddha smiled.

"Exactly."

"What depends completely upon causes cannot simultaneously be independent of them."

The assembly reflected upon these words.

Many realized that they had imagined greatness as something possessed.

Now they began to understand greatness as something continually arising through relationship.

Beyond the Idea of a Supreme Self

Krishna asked,

"Blessed One, when I looked inward before today, I believed there must be an unchanging essence beneath all experience."

"And now?"

"I have searched."

"I have examined body."

"I have examined feeling."

"I have examined perception."

"I have examined intentions."

"I have examined consciousness."

"I have examined every heavenly attainment available to me."

"I find only processes."

"I no longer find an independent ruler standing behind them."

The Buddha replied,

"When a flame burns, where is the separate thing called 'fire' apart from fuel, heat, oxygen, and combustion?"

Krishna answered,

"It cannot be found."

"So too what we conventionally call a person."

"There is functioning."

"There is experience."

"There is responsibility."

"There is compassion."

"But no separate, independent essence governing from outside conditions."

The younger devas looked astonished.

One asked,

"Then is there no meaning in speaking of lordship at all?"

The Buddha answered,

"There is meaning at the conventional level."

"A wise ruler may indeed be called lord."

"A compassionate guide may indeed be honored."

"But confusion begins when conventional language is mistaken for ultimate reality."

Krishna's Reflection

Krishna remained silent for a long time.

Then he addressed the assembly.

"My beloved friends, I now understand why I accepted the title of Supreme Lord."

"I observed my compassion."

"I observed my power."

"I observed my long life."

"I observed the devotion of countless worlds."

"Seeing nothing greater, I concluded nothing greater existed."

"But my conclusion arose from the limits of my perception."

"Not from the nature of reality."

He turned toward the Buddha.

"Blessed One, had I understood dependent origination earlier, I would have recognized that even my greatness depended upon immeasurable causes."

The Buddha replied,

"And because you understand it now, your compassion has become immeasurably greater."

Krishna asked,

"How so?"

The Blessed One answered,

"When one believes oneself to be the source of goodness, gratitude becomes difficult."

"But when one sees that every wholesome quality has arisen through innumerable conditions..."

"...the entire universe becomes worthy of gratitude."

At those words Krishna's eyes filled with tears once again.

He looked upon the devas, the Bodhisattvas, the distant worlds shining beyond Goloka, and finally upon the Buddha.

Joining his palms, he said,

"For immeasurable ages I thanked those who praised me."

"Today I thank the countless seen and unseen conditions that made even this moment possible."

The Blessed One smiled.

"The heart that lives in gratitude has already come very near Suchness."

The assembly rejoiced, and their minds became prepared for an even subtler inquiry: not merely into the idea of lordship, but into the deepest concept by which many sought to describe ultimate reality itself. That inquiry would concern the meaning of Brahman and the distinction between conceptual absolutes and the direct realization of Suchness.

Chapter 14 — Reconsidering Brahman

The Unconditioned and the Conditioned

When the rejoicing of the assembly had subsided, Krishna bowed once again before the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One," he said, "having examined my belief in myself as the Supreme Lord, another question naturally follows."

The Buddha nodded.

"Speak freely."

Krishna continued,

"For countless ages I contemplated what I called the Absolute."

"I believed there must exist an eternal reality standing behind the changing universe."

"I believed that by knowing this eternal reality, every question would be answered."

"I called that reality Brahman."

He lowered his head.

"Blessed One, was my search itself mistaken?"

The Buddha smiled gently.

"No, Great Bodhisattva."

"The longing to discover what is ultimately true is wholesome."

"The difficulty lies not in the search, but in what the mind imagines it has found."

The assembly became perfectly still.

The Buddha continued.

"Many beings perceive that conditioned things are impermanent."

"They therefore conclude there must exist another thing that is permanent."

"They observe change."

"They then imagine an unchanging substance."

"They observe dependence."

"They then imagine an independent essence."

"But tell me, Great Bodhisattva—does the perception of impermanence itself require the existence of a permanent object?"

Krishna reflected.

"No."

"Does the arising of conditions require an independent controller standing outside all conditions?"

"No."

The Buddha inclined his head.

"Then let us investigate further."

Suchness and Conceptual Absolutes

The Blessed One picked up a perfectly clear crystal from the jeweled ground.

Holding it before the assembly, he asked,

"What do you see?"

"A crystal," answered the devas.

The Buddha placed it beneath sunlight.

Immediately every color of the rainbow appeared.

The crystal itself remained transparent.

The colors danced across the pavilion.

The Buddha asked,

"Where are the colors?"

"Within the light."

"Within the crystal."

"Within our eyes."

The assembly gave many answers.

The Buddha smiled.

"They arise through relationship."

"No single condition alone produces them."

He then set the crystal aside.

"Great Bodhisattva, many attempt to describe ultimate reality."

"Some call it the Absolute."

"Some the Eternal."

"Some the One."

"Some the Ground."

"Some employ countless other names."

"Yet every name is a concept."

"Every concept is fashioned by the mind."

Krishna listened with complete attention.

The Buddha continued.

"Suchness is not reached because a more perfect concept has been invented."

"Suchness is realized when clinging to concepts completely ceases."

Krishna closed his eyes.

"I understand."

"I sought ultimate reality as though it were another object waiting to be discovered."

The Buddha replied,

"Reality was never hidden behind appearances."

"It is the true nature of appearances themselves when they are seen without grasping."

Beyond Eternalism and Nihilism

One of the elder devas rose respectfully.

"Blessed One, if ultimate reality is not an eternal substance, should we then conclude that nothing possesses meaning?"

The Buddha answered immediately.

"No."

"That would be the opposite error."

He drew two lines in the jeweled earth.

One extended toward the right.

The other toward the left.

Pointing to the first, he said,

"This is the view that seeks permanence within conditioned existence."

Pointing to the second, he continued,

"This is the view that denies all significance because conditioned things change."

He then drew a path between them.

"The Dharma walks neither road."

Krishna asked,

"Why?"

The Blessed One answered,

"Because what is dependently arisen is neither independently eternal nor utterly nonexistent."

"When rain falls, the flower blooms."

"When the rain ceases, the flower fades."

"The flower is not an illusion."

"Neither is it permanent."

"So too with worlds."

"So too with minds."

"So too with compassion."

"So too with awakening."

The Bodhisattvas smiled.

For they recognized the Middle Way being taught once more.

The Finger and the Moon

The Buddha looked toward the moon shining above Goloka.

Then he raised one finger toward it.

"Great Bodhisattva, what do you see?"

Krishna answered,

"The moon."

The Buddha asked,

"Do you mistake my finger for the moon?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because the finger only points."

The Blessed One smiled.

"So too with every word."

"'Lord' points."

"'Self' points."

"'Emptiness' points."

"'Nirvāṇa' points."

"'Brahman' points."

"'Suchness' points."

"None of the words are the reality to which they refer."

Krishna remained silent for a long time.

At last he spoke.

"For immeasurable ages I polished the finger."

"I argued over the finger."

"I invited others to admire the finger."

"I scarcely looked where it pointed."

The entire assembly laughed gently.

Even the Buddha smiled.

"There is no shame in this."

"Nearly every philosopher has at some time embraced the finger."

Krishna's New Understanding

Krishna rose from his seat.

He turned toward the countless devas who had once repeated his every word.

"My beloved friends," he said,

"When I first sought what is ultimate, I imagined that ultimate reality must be an everlasting object."

"I now understand that this assumption itself prevented direct seeing."

"The Dharma has not given me another concept to defend."

"It has invited me to release every concept at the moment it becomes something to cling to."

He paused.

"When I speak now of Suchness, I do not speak of another heavenly realm."

"I do not speak of another being."

"I do not speak of another hidden substance."

"I speak of reality directly experienced when the mind ceases grasping."

He turned once more toward the Buddha.

"Blessed One, is this understanding correct?"

The Buddha answered,

"It is well spoken."

"But remember also this."

"Do not cling even to the idea of Suchness."

"For if Suchness becomes another possession of the mind, it has already been turned into something less than Suchness."

Krishna laughed softly.

"The path becomes increasingly subtle."

The Buddha replied,

"It becomes increasingly simple."

The assembly rejoiced.

Many devas experienced a profound release from attachment to fixed philosophical views.

Others quietly resolved to continue investigating their own minds rather than merely defending cherished concepts.

The Blessed One then looked compassionately upon Krishna.

"There remains one further matter."

"You once understood your compassionate activity through the symbol of Viṣṇu, the all-pervading sustainer."

"Let us now examine how compassion itself may be understood without clinging to any fixed identity, so that boundless activity and freedom from attachment become perfectly united."

Thus the assembly prepared for the next teaching.

Chapter 15 — Reconsidering Viṣṇu

Cosmic Compassion Without Eternal Self

The Blessed One remained seated beneath the celestial tree.

The assembly waited with undivided attention.

Krishna bowed and spoke.

"Blessed One, there remains one question nearest to my heart."

The Buddha replied,

"Speak, Great Bodhisattva."

Krishna said,

"For countless ages I understood my compassionate activity through the name Viṣṇu, the All-Pervading Sustainer. I believed that because compassion seemed to reach innumerable worlds, there must exist an eternal being who sustained them all."

He paused.

"I now see that I mistook myself for that being."

"But what of the compassion itself?"

The Buddha smiled.

"A worthy question."

He continued,

"Tell me, Great Bodhisattva.

When rain falls upon a forest, does it choose only the tallest trees?"

"It does not."

"When the sun rises, does it shine only upon the virtuous?"

"It does not."

"When a river flows, does it refuse the thirsty because they have spoken harshly?"

"It does not."

The Buddha folded his hands.

"So too is awakened compassion."

"It embraces without possessing."

"It nourishes without ruling."

"It serves without claiming ownership."

"It acts without imagining an independent actor."

Krishna reflected deeply.

"So compassion itself does not require an eternal self."

"No."

"It requires only wisdom free from clinging."

Symbol and Reality

One of the elder devas respectfully asked,

"Blessed One, if beings use sacred symbols to cultivate compassion, should they abandon those symbols?"

The Buddha answered,

"Not if the symbol leads toward wisdom."

He picked up a lotus blossom growing beside him.

"What is this?"

"A lotus," answered the assembly.

The Buddha asked,

"Does the lotus create purity?"

"No."

"What then?"

"It reminds us of purity."

The Buddha nodded.

"The symbol is not the realization."

"But a symbol wisely understood may become a wholesome condition leading toward realization."

Krishna listened carefully.

The Buddha turned toward him.

"Great Bodhisattva, throughout countless worlds your name became a symbol."

"For many, it became a reminder of kindness."

"For many, it inspired generosity."

"For many, it awakened courage."

"These wholesome fruits should not be despised."

Krishna bowed.

"I understand."

"The mistake was not compassion."

"The mistake was believing the symbol itself to be ultimate."

The Buddha replied,

"Exactly."

"When the finger becomes more important than the moon, confusion arises."

"When the finger faithfully points toward the moon, it fulfills its purpose."

Skillful Means

Krishna then asked,

"Blessed One, should my devotees cease speaking my name?"

The Buddha answered,

"Answer this yourself."

Krishna contemplated for a long while.

Then he spoke.

"If speaking my name strengthens attachment to a permanent self, then it obscures wisdom."

"If speaking my name awakens loving-kindness, generosity, humility, and compassion, then it becomes a wholesome condition."

The Buddha smiled.

"You have understood skillful means."

The younger devas listened intently.

The Blessed One continued,

"Medicine differs according to illness."

"One patient requires rest."

"Another requires movement."

"Another requires bitter herbs."

"Another requires sweet nourishment."

"So too with the Dharma."

"Some awaken through quiet meditation."

"Some through acts of generosity."

"Some through profound philosophical inquiry."

"Some through devotion purified by wisdom."

The assembly became joyful.

For they understood that compassion takes many forms without abandoning truth.

A New Understanding of Devotion

Krishna rose and addressed the countless beings gathered throughout Goloka.

"My beloved friends,

Formerly many of you believed that devotion meant exalting me above all beings.

Today I ask something different."

"If you wish to honor me, feed the hungry."

"If you wish to praise me, comfort the fearful."

"If you wish to remember me, forgive those who have wronged you."

"If you wish to offer me flowers, first offer kindness to those who suffer."

"If you wish to build my temple, build first a heart free from hatred."

The devas listened with tears.

Krishna continued,

"If chanting my name reminds you to cultivate compassion, continue."

"If singing hymns fills your mind with loving-kindness, continue."

"If contemplating my life inspires humility, continue."

"But never imagine that these practices replace direct realization."

"Let every act of devotion become a bridge toward wisdom."

"Let every expression of love become compassion for every sentient being."

The Blessed One rejoiced.

"Well spoken."

"Devotion purified by wisdom becomes a powerful vehicle for awakening."

The All-Pervading Dharma

Krishna then asked one final question.

"Blessed One, I once believed that I pervaded all worlds."

The Buddha replied,

"What have you discovered now?"

Krishna looked across the immeasurable cosmos revealed before the assembly.

He saw Buddhas teaching in distant Buddha-fields.

He saw Bodhisattvas serving unnoticed.

He saw ordinary people quietly performing acts of kindness.

He saw children comforting one another.

He saw strangers helping strangers.

He saw compassion appearing wherever wisdom touched the heart.

Then he smiled.

"I do not pervade all worlds."

"But the Dharma may be realized in every world."

"My compassion reaches only where causes and conditions allow."

"But the possibility of awakening is never absent."

The Buddha inclined his head.

"Excellent."

"You once imagined yourself to be that which pervaded all existence."

"Now you understand that dependent origination leaves no place where wisdom and compassion cannot arise."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"I no longer wish beings to think,

'Krishna alone sustains the worlds.'

Instead may they understand:

Wherever generosity appears, the Dharma is present.

Wherever hatred is abandoned, the Dharma is present.

Wherever wisdom and compassion become inseparable, the activity of the Bodhisattvas is present."

The entire assembly joined their palms.

Many who had formerly regarded Krishna as the final destination now regarded him as a radiant spiritual friend walking the Bodhisattva Path.

The Blessed One looked upon him with quiet joy.

"Great Bodhisattva, you have transformed what was once centered upon yourself into boundless compassion for all beings."

Krishna bowed.

"Blessed One, all that remains is gratitude."

The Buddha replied,

"Then let gratitude become action."

"For the awakened heart does not remain still.

It continually manifests for the welfare of the world."

Thus the assembly prepared to examine one final element of Krishna's former understanding: the meaning of his universal manifestation, and the distinction between immeasurable spiritual vision and perfect awakening.

Chapter 16 — The Universal Form Revisited

The Earlier Vision

When the Blessed One had finished speaking, Krishna remained seated in contemplation.

At length he raised his eyes.

"Blessed One," he said, "among all the teachings I once gave, none inspired greater wonder than the revelation of my universal form. Countless beings looked upon that vision and concluded that I was Ultimate Reality itself."

He paused.

"I myself believed the same."

The Buddha replied,

"Then let us examine the vision carefully."

The Blessed One extended his right hand.

Immediately the sky above Goloka became a mirror of immeasurable clarity.

The assembly once again beheld the great vision once shown to Arjuna.

Krishna's body expanded beyond all ordinary measure.

Stars shone within him.

Worlds revolved like jeweled wheels.

The movements of galaxies appeared like ripples upon an endless sea.

Hosts of devas filled the heavens.

The births and deaths of civilizations unfolded within that radiant manifestation.

Even time itself seemed gathered into one vast display.

Many of the younger devas gasped.

The vision remained as majestic as ever.

The Buddha asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, was this illusion?"

Krishna answered immediately.

"No, Blessed One."

"It truly occurred."

"Indeed."

"It was not deception."

"It was a genuine manifestation produced through profound concentration, immeasurable merit, and extraordinary karmic attainment."

The Buddha allowed the vision to remain.

"It should not be denied."

"Nor should it be misunderstood."

The Difference Between Cosmic Magnitude and Awakening

The Blessed One then spoke.

"Suppose a king possesses the greatest palace in the world."

"Does possessing the largest palace make him the wisest?"

"No," answered Krishna.

"Suppose another possesses the greatest army."

"Does that establish perfect understanding?"

"No."

"Suppose another lives for ten billion years."

"Does longevity itself remove ignorance?"

"No."

The Buddha continued,

"Now suppose a great deva reveals a vision embracing innumerable worlds."

"Does the magnitude of the vision itself establish complete awakening?"

Krishna lowered his head.

"No."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Exactly."

He pointed toward the immense universal form.

"What you revealed was vast."

"But vastness is not the measure of Buddhahood."

Krishna reflected.

"I understand now."

"My manifestation revealed the breadth of my karmic realization."

"It did not reveal limitless reality itself."

The Buddha nodded.

"A lake may faithfully reflect the sky."

"But however clear the reflection, the lake does not contain the entire heavens."

"So too the universal form reflected an extraordinary realization."

"It did not encompass the immeasurable totality of dependent origination."

Miracles Do Not Equal Omniscience

One celestial sage then approached the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One," he asked, "if miracles do not establish omniscience, why do Buddhas perform miracles at all?"

The Buddha answered,

"For compassion."

"Never for proof."

The sage bowed.

The Blessed One continued.

"When a child refuses medicine, a physician may sweeten it with honey."

"The sweetness is not the cure."

"It merely helps the cure be received."

"So too miracles."

"They open hearts."

"They inspire confidence."

"They awaken faith."

"But they do not themselves produce liberation."

"Liberation arises only through directly seeing reality."

Krishna folded his palms.

"Blessed One, throughout my former life as lord of Goloka, I often believed my miracles confirmed my conclusions."

The Buddha asked,

"And now?"

Krishna smiled gently.

"I understand they confirmed only that profound concentration and vast merit produce extraordinary abilities."

"They never established that every conclusion I reached was complete."

The Buddha rejoiced.

"Excellent."

The younger devas whispered among themselves.

One asked,

"Then could even a being possessing miracles still remain within ignorance?"

The Buddha answered,

"Yes."

"And could one possessing few miracles nevertheless attain awakening?"

"Indeed."

"Many disciples realize Nirvāṇa without displaying extraordinary powers."

"What liberates is wisdom."

"Miracles are secondary."

Seeing the Universal Form Anew

The Blessed One then turned once more toward the great vision.

"Great Bodhisattva, look again."

Krishna gazed deeply into his own former manifestation.

This time he noticed something he had never seen before.

Every star depended upon countless causes.

Every world depended upon innumerable conditions.

Every deva depended upon karma.

Every movement depended upon everything else.

Nothing within the vision stood independently.

Nothing possessed its own permanent essence.

Even the magnificent universal form itself existed only through concentration, karma, merit, and conditions.

He laughed softly.

"I once believed this vision demonstrated independence."

"Now I see that it demonstrates interdependence."

The Buddha smiled broadly.

"You have understood."

"The very manifestation that once strengthened conceit has now become a teaching of dependent origination."

The assembly rejoiced.

For the same vision had become transformed through wisdom.

Krishna's New Teaching

Krishna rose and addressed the devas.

"My beloved friends,

If ever you contemplate the universal form I once revealed, contemplate it differently."

"Do not think,

'Behold an eternal ruler standing above reality.'

Instead understand,

'Behold the immeasurable web of causes and conditions through which even the greatest manifestations arise.'"

"When you see galaxies within that vision, remember impermanence."

"When you see worlds within that vision, remember dependent origination."

"When you see radiant forms, remember emptiness."

"When you see beauty beyond imagination, remember that even beauty changes."

"If the vision inspires awe, let that awe become humility."

"If it inspires devotion, let devotion become compassion."

"If it inspires inquiry, continue investigating until no clinging remains."

The Blessed One listened with quiet delight.

Then he spoke before the assembly.

"Great Bodhisattva, the same vision that once caused beings to cling has now become a gateway to wisdom."

"This is the power of right understanding."

"For wisdom does not destroy symbols."

"It liberates them from misunderstanding."

A Question Yet Unanswered

Krishna bowed.

"Blessed One, one matter still remains."

The Buddha nodded.

"You are thinking of your descent into the human world."

"I am."

"For countless generations many have understood that descent as the appearance of an eternal divine being entering history."

"I myself believed this."

The Blessed One looked upon Krishna with boundless compassion.

"Then let us examine what truly descended."

"Not in order to diminish compassion..."

"...but to understand how great beings appear within the world through dependent origination."

The entire assembly became silent.

For they understood that the next teaching would illuminate not only Krishna's own life, but the compassionate appearance of all Bodhisattvas throughout the countless worlds.

Chapter 17 — The Meaning of Avatar

Compassionate Manifestation

When the Blessed One had finished speaking, Krishna remained in deep contemplation.

After a long silence he said,

"Blessed One, throughout countless ages beings have spoken of my descent into the human world as an avatāra. I myself accepted this understanding. If I was not an eternal being descending from beyond existence, then how should my birth be understood?"

The Buddha replied,

"Great Bodhisattva, let us first consider the appearance of the moon."

The assembly looked upward.

The full moon shone above Goloka.

The Buddha asked,

"When the moon is reflected upon one hundred lakes, how many moons have descended?"

One young deva answered,

"One hundred."

An elder deva smiled.

"No, Blessed One. There remains only one moon."

The Buddha nodded.

"And yet the reflections are not false."

"They genuinely appear."

"They illuminate the water."

"They guide travelers."

"They inspire poets."

"But none of them is the moon leaving the heavens."

Krishna reflected quietly.

"So compassionate manifestations may truly appear without requiring an eternal self to descend."

The Blessed One smiled.

"You understand well."

"A compassionate appearance is real."

"It is not an illusion."

"But neither does it require an independent, permanent being entering the world from outside dependent origination."

Birth Through Karma

The Buddha continued,

"Great Bodhisattva, tell me honestly."

"When you were born among human beings, did you possess parents?"

"I did."

"Did you possess a body?"

"I did."

"Did you experience childhood?"

"I did."

"Did you grow?"

"I did."

"Did you learn?"

"I did."

"Did you rejoice?"

"Yes."

"Did you grieve?"

"Yes."

The Buddha asked one final question.

"Did your appearance arise through causes and conditions?"

Krishna closed his eyes.

He examined the entirety of that lifetime.

His parents.

His companions.

His teachers.

His actions in former lives.

The karma that had matured.

The aspirations that had guided him.

Nothing appeared independently.

At last he answered,

"Yes."

"My birth was itself dependent origination."

The Blessed One replied,

"Exactly."

"Compassion does not suspend causality."

"It works through causality."

"A Bodhisattva does not appear by violating the Dharma."

"A Bodhisattva appears through the Dharma."

The assembly rejoiced.

Many devas had imagined compassion to be something imposed upon the universe from beyond.

Now they understood it as the most beautiful flowering of dependent origination itself.

The River of Vows

Krishna then asked,

"Blessed One, if there is no eternal self passing from life to life, who made the vows that led me here?"

The Buddha pointed toward a great river flowing through Goloka.

"Observe the river."

Krishna watched its clear waters.

The Buddha asked,

"Is this the same river that flowed yesterday?"

"It has changed."

"The same water?"

"No."

"The same current?"

"No."

"Yet do we still call it by one name?"

"Yes."

The Buddha continued,

"So too with the Bodhisattva Path."

"The vows continue."

"The compassionate intention continues."

"The causal stream continues."

"But nowhere within that stream can an independent, unchanging self be found."

Krishna smiled.

"My vows have continued without requiring an eternal owner."

The Buddha nodded.

"As one lamp lights another, the flame continues."

"Yet no permanent flame passes from lamp to lamp."

"So too with karma."

"So too with compassion."

"So too with awakening."

Why Even Great Beings Continue Learning

Krishna remained thoughtful.

"Blessed One, one question still humbles me."

The Buddha looked kindly upon him.

"Ask."

"For countless kalpas I cultivated compassion."

"I inspired virtue."

"I guided innumerable beings."

"How then did I still require instruction?"

The Blessed One answered,

"Because the Bodhisattva Path is immeasurable."

"No one begins with perfect wisdom."

"Even the greatest compassion continues maturing."

He continued,

"Consider a vast tree."

"It begins as a seed."

"When it reaches one hundred cubits in height, does it deny having once been a seed?"

"No."

"Does it stop growing merely because it has become the tallest tree in the forest?"

"No."

"So too with spiritual realization."

"One who ceases learning has already mistaken the forest for the entire earth."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"I now understand why awakening is accompanied by humility."

The Buddha smiled.

"The closer wisdom approaches completeness, the less interest it has in proclaiming itself complete."

The Bodhisattva Appears Wherever Needed

One of the Bodhisattvas in the assembly then asked,

"World-Honored One, if compassionate manifestations arise through dependent origination, may they appear in many forms?"

The Blessed One replied,

"Indeed."

"They may appear as kings."

"As queens."

"As monks."

"As nuns."

"As teachers."

"As physicians."

"As children."

"As friends."

"As strangers."

"As devas."

"As ordinary people whose names history never records."

"They appear wherever causes and conditions allow compassion to benefit beings."

Krishna folded his palms.

"Then my human birth was neither unique nor isolated."

"It was one expression of a much greater current of compassionate activity."

The Buddha answered,

"Precisely."

"When beings cling to the appearance, they miss the activity."

"When they understand the activity, every compassionate life becomes worthy of reverence."

Krishna's Resolution

Krishna turned toward the devas gathered throughout Goloka.

"My beloved friends,

Formerly I wished you to remember my birth alone."

"Now I ask something greater."

"When you see a mother comforting her frightened child, honor compassion."

"When you see a physician serving the sick without seeking praise, honor compassion."

"When you see a monk teaching patiently, honor compassion."

"When you see a stranger feeding one who is hungry, honor compassion."

"When you see anyone sacrificing selfish comfort for the welfare of another, recognize the activity of the Bodhisattva Path."

"Do not ask first,

'Who is greatest?'

Ask instead,

'Where is compassion appearing?'"

The Blessed One rejoiced.

"Excellent, Great Bodhisattva."

"You once wished beings to recognize your manifestation."

"Now you rejoice whenever they recognize compassion itself."

"This is the mind of a Bodhisattva."

The heavens filled once more with celestial blossoms.

Not because a god had claimed supremacy.

But because one who had once accepted such praise now delighted in disappearing behind the compassionate activity of the Dharma itself.

Thus the assembly became prepared for Krishna's greatest task yet: returning to those who had loved him for countless ages and teaching them a new understanding of devotion founded not upon attachment, but upon wisdom inseparable from boundless compassion.

Part VI — Bhakti Transformed

Chapter 18 — Calling the Devotees Together

The Great Assembly

After the discourse concerning compassionate manifestation had concluded, Krishna rose from his seat and bowed deeply before the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One," he said, "I have seen reality more clearly than ever before. Yet there remains one duty I cannot neglect."

The Buddha asked,

"What duty is that, Great Bodhisattva?"

Krishna answered,

"Those who trusted me deserve to hear from me directly."

"I will not allow others to tell them what has occurred."

"I myself shall speak."

The Blessed One smiled.

"A compassionate teacher does not hide from those who have placed their confidence in him."

Krishna joined his palms.

"Then, Blessed One, please remain in Goloka while I gather every being who has ever sought refuge in me."

The Buddha replied,

"I shall remain."

At once Krishna entered a profound meditative concentration.

Unlike former times, he did not project his mind to display his own greatness.

Instead, his compassion reached outward.

Across countless world-systems, beings who cherished Krishna experienced a quiet stirring within their hearts.

Some were devas.

Some were humans.

Some dwelt in distant celestial realms.

Some were wandering ascetics.

Some were kings.

Some were shepherds.

Some were mothers rocking their children to sleep.

Some were old men quietly repeating Krishna's name with gratitude.

Some were young women singing hymns while preparing food for the poor.

Some had never seen Goloka.

Others had dwelt there for countless ages.

Each heard the same gentle invitation within the heart.

> "Come.
>
> A new teaching is to be given.
>
> Come without fear."

By the power of wholesome karma and the compassionate vow of Krishna, an immeasurable assembly gathered within Goloka.

The jeweled fields became filled beyond number.

Lotus lakes reflected endless rows of luminous beings.

Even neighboring devas who had never worshiped Krishna came to listen.

Above them all, seated beneath the celestial tree, remained the Blessed Buddha.

Many devotees looked upon him with curiosity.

Others wondered,

"Who is this serene sage before whom even Krishna bows?"

Krishna's Confession

When all had assembled, Krishna rose.

For a long time he said nothing.

He looked upon the faces before him.

Some had loved him for one lifetime.

Others for thousands.

Still others had followed him through many rebirths.

His heart overflowed with gratitude.

At last he spoke.

"My beloved friends...

Before I teach anything further...

There is something I must first confess."

The assembly became perfectly silent.

"For immeasurable ages I accepted your praise."

"I accepted your devotion."

"I accepted your trust."

"I did so sincerely believing that I understood the highest truth."

He paused.

"I now know that my understanding was incomplete."

A murmur passed through the assembly.

Some devas looked confused.

Others looked frightened.

Krishna continued gently.

"I never intended to deceive you."

"I spoke according to the highest realization I possessed."

"But there existed a wisdom greater than my own."

"I have now encountered that wisdom."

He turned toward the Blessed One.

"It was revealed to me by the Buddha."

Many devotees followed Krishna's gaze.

For the first time they truly looked upon the Tathāgata.

No jeweled ornaments adorned him.

No crown rested upon his head.

No armies surrounded him.

Yet the peace radiating from him surpassed even the splendor of Goloka.

One elderly deva whispered,

"I have never seen such stillness."

Joy Mixed with Sorrow

A devotee rose from the assembly.

His voice trembled.

"My Lord...

Have we been wrong to love you?"

Krishna immediately descended from his seat.

He approached the devotee and took both of his hands.

"No."

"Never think that."

"Love rooted in gratitude is never wasted."

Another devotee stood.

"Have our hymns been meaningless?"

Krishna smiled warmly.

"If those hymns softened your heart...

They were not meaningless."

"If they inspired generosity...

They were not meaningless."

"If they helped you forgive...

They were not meaningless."

A young woman then asked through tears,

"My Lord...

Have we worshiped falsely?"

Krishna answered slowly.

"What must change is not your capacity to love."

"It is what you imagine love requires."

He looked across the entire assembly.

"Formerly many of you believed that loving me required believing me to be the ultimate reality."

"I ask that of you no longer."

The assembly remained silent.

Krishna continued.

"If you love me...

Then allow your love to become wider than my person."

"Love every being who suffers."

"Love every frightened child."

"Love every weary traveler."

"Love every creature seeking happiness."

"If you love only Krishna...

Your heart remains too small."

"If you love all beings because your friendship with Krishna taught you compassion...

Then your devotion has matured."

Many wept openly.

Their sorrow slowly became relief.

The fear of losing Krishna dissolved.

Instead they discovered a friendship no longer dependent upon clinging.

The Buddha Addresses the Devotees

At that moment the Blessed One spoke.

His voice was gentle enough that every being heard it as though spoken personally.

"Those who have cultivated kindness through remembering Krishna have not labored in vain."

"For every wholesome intention bears fruit."

"But all wholesome paths find their fulfillment when joined with wisdom."

The Buddha continued,

"Do not imagine that Krishna has become less worthy of your affection."

"He has become freer."

"He no longer stands before you asking to be your destination."

"He now walks beside you as a Bodhisattva."

The devotees turned toward Krishna.

He bowed—not to receive their reverence, but in gratitude for their sincerity.

One child asked innocently,

"If Krishna is now a Bodhisattva...

May we still call him our friend?"

Krishna's eyes filled with tears.

"There is no title I would cherish more."

The Blessed One smiled.

"A friend who points beyond himself is a rare treasure."

The Turning of Devotion

Krishna addressed the assembly one final time.

"My beloved friends,

Today I ask you for one offering."

"Do not build me a greater throne."

"Do not compose more magnificent praises."

"Instead..."

He looked toward the Blessed One.

"...learn the Dharma."

"Study impermanence."

"Contemplate dependent origination."

"Practice generosity."

"Guard your speech."

"Train your minds."

"Cultivate loving-kindness."

"Develop compassion."

"Seek wisdom."

"If, after doing these things, you still remember me with affection..."

"...then our friendship shall continue throughout immeasurable kalpas."

The entire assembly rose as one.

None cried,

"Krishna is Supreme!"

Instead, with palms joined, they declared,

"May wisdom and compassion flourish throughout all worlds."

The Blessed One looked upon the multitude with serene joy.

Then he turned to Krishna.

"Great Bodhisattva."

"Yes, Blessed One."

"Their hearts have been opened."

"They are now ready."

Krishna bowed.

"Ready for what?"

The Buddha answered,

"To understand what devotion becomes when it is completely freed from attachment."

Thus the Great Assembly concluded, and the devotees prepared to receive Krishna's next discourse concerning the true nature of bhakti transformed by the Dharma.

Chapter 19 — The New Meaning of Bhakti

Love Without Delusion

The following day, the devas and devotees again assembled beneath the great celestial tree.

The Blessed One remained seated in serene silence.

Krishna rose and bowed first to the Buddha, then to the immeasurable assembly.

"My beloved friends,

Yesterday I confessed my former misunderstanding.

Today I wish to speak not about what must be abandoned, but about what may remain forever."

A young deva asked,

"My Lord, what remains?"

Krishna smiled.

"Love."

The assembly grew quiet.

"Not the love that grasps.

Not the love that possesses.

Not the love that fears losing its object.

But the love that rejoices simply because another being exists."

He continued,

"When I believed myself to be the Highest Reality, your devotion naturally became centered upon me.

Now I ask that your devotion become centered upon compassion itself.

If your love cannot expand beyond one being, then it remains incomplete.

If your love grows until it embraces all beings equally, then it has become the heart of the Bodhisattva."

The Blessed One nodded.

"Love purified by wisdom is immeasurable."

Devotion Without Attachment

One devotee stood and bowed.

"Great Bodhisattva, how do we know whether our devotion contains attachment?"

Krishna answered,

"Ask yourselves these questions."

"If I could no longer see Krishna, would compassion disappear from my heart?"

"If another teacher helped beings awaken, would I rejoice or become jealous?"

"If someone followed a different wholesome path, would I wish them well?"

"If my prayers were not answered as I desired, would kindness remain?"

He allowed the questions to settle.

"If your love depends upon receiving something in return, attachment remains.

If your love continues even when nothing is gained,
compassion has begun to blossom."

The Buddha then added,

"Attachment says,

'May this person belong to me.'

Compassion says,

'May this being be free from suffering.'

Attachment seeks possession.

Compassion seeks liberation."

The assembly reflected deeply.

Many recognized that what they had long called devotion contained both love and subtle grasping.

Loving Krishna as a Spiritual Friend

An elderly woman who had remembered Krishna's name throughout many human lives approached him.

Tears filled her eyes.

"My Lord...

If I no longer think of you as the Supreme Lord...

Who are you to me?"

Krishna descended from the lotus platform and knelt before her.

"I am your friend upon the Path."

The woman began to weep.

"My friend?"

Krishna gently took her hands.

"If remembering my life encourages you to become kinder...

Remember me.

If recalling my mistakes gives you courage to admit your own...

Remember me.

If seeing my awakening inspires you never to stop learning...

Remember me.

If our friendship strengthens your confidence in the Dharma...

Then let your heart rejoice."

He smiled warmly.

"But never imagine that I stand between you and awakening.

Walk beside me.

Do not stop at me."

The woman bowed deeply.

"My friend," she whispered.

Krishna bowed in return.

"My friend."

The Blessed One observed this exchange with quiet delight.

He said,

"When friendship is free from clinging, it becomes one of the purest forms of love."

Chanting as Mindfulness

A celestial musician then rose.

"Great Bodhisattva, for countless ages we have sung your name.

Should we now fall silent?"

Krishna answered,

"Tell me first,

Why do you sing?"

The musician reflected.

"When I sing, my mind becomes gentle.

Anger disappears.

Pride softens.

I remember kindness."

Krishna smiled.

"Then your singing has already become meditation."

The musician looked surprised.

"It has?"

"Yes."

"What purifies the mind through wholesome recollection is worthy of cultivation."

The Blessed One then spoke.

"A name has no power by itself.

The mind that remembers gives it meaning."

"If remembrance gives rise to greed, abandon it.

If remembrance gives rise to hatred, abandon it.

If remembrance gives rise to conceit, abandon it.

But if remembrance gives rise to mindfulness, compassion, gratitude, and wisdom, then it has become a wholesome condition."

Krishna added,

"When you chant my name, do not imagine that you are calling an eternal ruler from beyond the universe.

Instead remember these qualities:

Compassion.

Humility.

Generosity.

Patience.

Joy in the welfare of others.

Then every repetition becomes an occasion for awakening."

The celestial musicians bowed.

From that day forward, their hymns no longer praised supremacy.

They praised compassion, gratitude, humility, and the endless Bodhisattva Path.

Remembering Krishna as a Spiritual Friend

As the discourse neared its conclusion, Krishna looked across the immeasurable multitude.

"My beloved friends,

Every friendship changes.

Every body changes.

Every heaven changes.

Even Goloka shall one day pass away.

Do not be saddened by this.

Because what is born from wisdom does not depend upon permanence."

He continued,

"If one day Goloka disappears...

Continue practicing compassion.

If one day my name is forgotten...

Continue practicing compassion.

If one day statues crumble...

Continue practicing compassion.

If one day songs are no longer sung...

Continue practicing compassion.

For wherever compassion is practiced without attachment...

There I shall rejoice."

The Blessed One then addressed the assembly.

"To remember a Bodhisattva rightly is not merely to remember his name.

It is to cultivate the qualities he embodies."

Krishna bowed deeply before the Buddha.

"Blessed One,

Today I understand bhakti more clearly than ever before.

Formerly I believed devotion reached its fulfillment in loving me.

Now I see that devotion reaches its fulfillment when love becomes boundless compassion for all beings."

The Buddha smiled.

"Well spoken, Great Bodhisattva.

When devotion becomes inseparable from wisdom, it is no longer a chain.

It becomes wings."

The devas rejoiced.

The musicians took up their instruments once more.

Yet the songs that echoed through Goloka were unlike those of former ages.

They no longer proclaimed,

"Krishna alone is supreme."

Instead they sang,

"May every heart awaken.

May wisdom arise.

May compassion know no boundary.

May all beings cross the ocean of suffering together."

And throughout Goloka, countless devotees discovered that nothing precious had been taken from them.

Rather, their love had become immeasurably larger than before.

Chapter 20 — Chanting with Right View

Remembering Virtue

After many days of teaching, one of the eldest devotees approached Krishna.

He had chanted Krishna's name every day for thousands of human lifetimes before attaining birth in Goloka.

Bowing deeply, he asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, there is one question that still troubles my heart."

Krishna smiled gently.

"Speak freely."

The devotee said,

"For ages I have repeated your name with faith.

Must I now abandon that practice?"

Krishna looked toward the Blessed One.

The Buddha nodded.

Then Krishna answered,

"No."

The devotee looked surprised.

Krishna continued,

"It is not the sound that binds.

It is the view accompanying the sound."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Well spoken."

Krishna continued,

"If one person speaks my name believing,

'Krishna alone will save me while I remain unchanged,'

that remembrance strengthens delusion."

"But if another speaks my name while remembering compassion, generosity, patience, humility, and the Bodhisattva Path,

the same sound becomes a wholesome condition."

The devotee bowed.

"So it is the mind that transforms the practice."

Krishna answered,

"Exactly."

The Four Recollections

Krishna then addressed the entire assembly.

"If you wish to continue chanting my name, let each repetition become a recollection."

He raised one finger.

"The first recollection is gratitude."

"Remember every act of kindness you have received."

"Do not imagine that you have walked alone."

He raised a second finger.

"The second recollection is humility."

"Remember that even Krishna continued learning."

"If I could relinquish conceit after immeasurable ages,

surely we may all continue learning."

A third finger.

"The third recollection is compassion."

"Each repetition should widen the heart."

"If your chanting ends and you love your neighbor no more than before,

begin again."

The fourth finger.

"The fourth recollection is wisdom."

"Remember that every sound arises and ceases.

Every thought arises and ceases.

Every repetition arises and ceases.

Observe them without clinging."

The Blessed One rejoiced.

"These four recollections purify remembrance."

Cultivating Loving-Kindness

A young woman then asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, how should we practice when we chant together?"

Krishna answered,

"When you begin, first establish this thought:

'May I be free from hatred.'

Then continue,

'May those I love be free from suffering.'

Next,

'May those who oppose me be free from suffering.'

Finally,

'May every sentient being throughout limitless worlds be free from suffering.'

Only then begin chanting."

The assembly reflected deeply.

Krishna continued,

"If your voice becomes beautiful while your heart remains narrow,

you have merely learned music."

"If your voice trembles while your heart embraces every living being,

your chanting has become Dharma."

The celestial musicians lowered their instruments.

They understood that technique alone could never equal compassion.

The Blessed One added,

"The sweetest sound in all the worlds is not the most skillfully sung hymn.

It is the sincere intention that every being awaken."

Bhakti as Bodhicitta

Krishna then turned toward the Bodhisattvas seated beside the Buddha.

He bowed to them.

"For countless ages I thought devotion culminated in nearness to me."

"I now understand its true fulfillment."

He addressed the assembly.

"What is Bodhicitta?"

One Bodhisattva answered,

"The mind that seeks awakening for the benefit of all beings."

Krishna smiled.

"Excellent."

He continued,

"If devotion inspires only one's own happiness,

its fruit remains small."

"If devotion gives rise to Bodhicitta,

its fruit becomes immeasurable."

The Blessed One asked,

"And how does this occur?"

Krishna answered,

"When a devotee says,

'I love Krishna,'

let him ask immediately,

'How shall I express that love today?'

Feed someone who is hungry.

Visit someone who is lonely.

Forgive someone who has wounded you.

Speak truthfully.

Protect life.

Practice generosity.

Meditate upon impermanence.

Study the Dharma.

Then the love once directed toward one Bodhisattva expands into compassion embracing the entire universe."

The Buddha smiled broadly.

"Thus bhakti ripens into Bodhicitta."

A New Mantra

One of the celestial musicians then asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, may we continue chanting your name?"

Krishna replied,

"You may.

But understand what you are remembering."

He then offered a new contemplation.

"When you say,

'Krishna...'

remember humility.

When you say,

'Krishna...'

remember compassion.

When you say,

'Krishna...'

remember impermanence.

When you say,

'Krishna...'

remember dependent origination.

When you say,

'Krishna...'

remember the Buddha who revealed these truths.

When you say,

'Krishna...'

renew your vow to benefit every sentient being."

The musicians repeated the contemplation.

Their voices filled Goloka.

The sound differed little from ancient times.

Yet the understanding had completely changed.

The Name as a Raft

As the discourse drew toward its close, the Blessed One addressed the entire assembly.

"Great Bodhisattva has spoken wisely."

"Remember this also."

"A raft is built to cross a river."

"Once the farther shore is reached, one does not carry the raft upon one's head."

"So too with names."

"They are skillful means."

"They help the mind gather wholesome qualities."

"But awakening lies not within the syllables themselves."

"It lies in directly realizing reality."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"My beloved friends,

If ever my name ceases to help you cultivate wisdom and compassion,

release it without sorrow.

If it continues to open your heart,

use it gratefully.

The purpose of every practice is awakening,

not attachment to the practice itself."

The Blessed One raised his hand in blessing.

The entire assembly instinctively joined their palms.

Many continued chanting Krishna's name.

Others sat in silent meditation.

Still others practiced loving-kindness without speaking at all.

The Buddha looked upon them equally.

For he saw that sincere practice assumes many forms when guided by right view.

Krishna then turned toward the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One,

My devotees have learned how devotion may become wisdom.

Yet there remains one final lesson."

The Buddha nodded.

"They must understand why the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha are called the Three Jewels."

Krishna bowed.

"And why I myself now take refuge in them."

Thus the assembly prepared to hear Krishna speak publicly of the refuge that had transformed his own heart and redirected the course of Goloka toward the Bodhisattva Path.

Chapter 21 — Honoring the Buddha

Why Krishna Calls the Buddha His Teacher

On the seventh day after the Great Assembly, the devotees gathered once more beneath the celestial Bodhi Tree.

This time there were no questions.

All waited quietly.

Krishna rose, walked toward the Blessed One, and, before the assembled devas and countless beings from innumerable worlds, knelt upon one knee.

He joined his palms.

Then, touching his forehead to the lotus ground before the Buddha, he spoke.

"My beloved friends,

For immeasurable ages you honored me.

Today I wish you to understand why I now honor another."

The assembly became completely silent.

Krishna continued,

"When I believed myself to be the highest, I sincerely thought there was no wisdom beyond my own.

Then I encountered the Blessed One.

He did not ask me to believe him.

He did not ask me to surrender my reason.

He did not command my devotion.

He asked only one question.

'Are you permanent?'

"That single question opened a gate I had never seen."

"He did not conquer me.

He invited me to investigate."

"He did not humiliate me.

He revealed what I myself had overlooked."

"He did not replace one attachment with another.

He showed me how to let attachment itself cease."

Krishna turned toward the Buddha.

"Therefore I call him my teacher."

"For a teacher is one who reveals what another cannot yet see."

The Blessed One replied,

"Great Bodhisattva, a true disciple honors the Dharma, not the person."

Krishna smiled.

"And because you taught me that, I honor you all the more."

Wisdom Above Miraculous Power

A young deva rose and bowed.

"Great Bodhisattva, throughout countless ages we admired your miraculous powers."

"You could appear in many worlds."

"You could reveal celestial forms."

"You could hear prayers across immeasurable distances."

"What wisdom surpasses such power?"

Krishna answered,

"I once believed that the greatest ability was to transform the outer world."

"I now understand that the greatest transformation is the ending of ignorance."

He continued,

"What value is the ability to move mountains if pride remains?"

"What value is a lifespan lasting countless kalpas if one still clings?"

"What value is appearing in a thousand worlds if one has not fully understood a single moment?"

The devotees reflected deeply.

Krishna then pointed toward the Buddha.

"The Blessed One possesses miracles.

Yet he never measures awakening by miracles."

"He measures it by freedom."

The Buddha nodded gently.

"A being may astonish the eyes.

Only wisdom liberates the heart."

Krishna added,

"I once sought to inspire wonder."

"The Blessed One inspires understanding."

"I now know which is greater."

Humility as the Highest Ornament

One of the celestial queens approached Krishna.

She carried the magnificent sapphire crown that had adorned him throughout immeasurable ages.

Bowing, she asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, should we continue to place this crown upon your head?"

Krishna looked toward the Buddha.

The Blessed One said,

"What do you think, Great Bodhisattva?"

Krishna reflected before answering.

"If the crown reminds beings of compassion, let it remain."

"If it inspires conceit, let it be laid aside."

The queen asked,

"And what shall be its greatest jewel?"

Krishna removed the central gem from the crown.

It shone with brilliant blue light.

Holding it in both hands, he placed it at the feet of the Buddha.

The assembly gasped.

Krishna spoke.

"Formerly this jewel reminded me of heavenly sovereignty."

"Now let it remind every ruler that wisdom is greater than authority."

The Buddha did not take the jewel.

Instead, he gently returned it to Krishna.

"Wear it."

"But wear it as one who serves."

Krishna accepted it with gratitude.

When he placed the crown upon his head once more, the devotees no longer saw merely a heavenly king.

They saw a Bodhisattva bearing responsibility with humility.

The Blessed One then addressed the assembly.

"There are ornaments fashioned from jewels.

There are ornaments fashioned from gold.

But the rarest ornament in all the worlds is humility joined with wisdom."

"No thief can steal it."

"No fire can burn it."

"No age can diminish it."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"For immeasurable ages I adorned my head."

"Today I seek only to adorn my conduct."

Taking Refuge

Krishna then faced the immeasurable multitude.

"My beloved friends,

Many of you have asked what has changed."

"I shall tell you plainly."

"I now take refuge in the Buddha."

The devas listened with astonishment.

"I take refuge in the Dharma."

"I take refuge in the Saṅgha."

He continued,

"I do not take refuge because I have been defeated."

"I take refuge because I have discovered a wisdom greater than my own."

"I do not take refuge out of fear."

"I take refuge out of gratitude."

"I do not cease loving you by taking refuge."

"I become more capable of loving you rightly."

A devotee asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, if we love you, should we also take refuge?"

Krishna smiled warmly.

"If you trust my friendship, then trust the direction in which I now point."

"I once pointed toward myself."

"Now I point toward the Three Jewels."

"Do not remain standing where I once stood."

"Walk with me."

The Blessed One looked across the assembly.

Many devas, many humans, many celestial musicians, and many sages joined their palms together.

With one voice they declared,

"I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

I take refuge in the Saṅgha."

Krishna joined them.

His voice was neither louder nor softer than any other.

He sought no place above the assembly.

He rejoiced simply to stand among fellow seekers of awakening.

The Blessed One smiled.

The smile contained neither triumph nor possession.

It was the quiet joy of seeing another great heart become a refuge not by claiming supremacy, but by relinquishing it.

Then the Buddha turned toward Krishna.

"Great Bodhisattva."

"Yes, Blessed One."

"Your devotees now understand refuge."

"There remains one final teaching before you begin your new mission."

Krishna bowed.

"What is that teaching?"

The Buddha answered,

"They must understand that wisdom and devotion are not enemies."

"When rightly understood, they become one path."

And thus the assembly prepared for the concluding discourse on the union of devotion and wisdom, by which bhakti would become inseparable from prajñā and compassion from Suchness.

Chapter 22 — The Union of Wisdom and Devotion

Bhakti and Prajñā

When the Blessed One had completed his discourse on refuge, a serene silence settled over Goloka.

The celestial musicians laid down their instruments.

The lotus lakes became perfectly still.

Even the fragrant winds seemed to pause, as though all of Goloka wished to hear the final instruction concerning devotion.

Krishna bowed before the Buddha.

"Blessed One," he said, "for countless ages I believed devotion and wisdom were two different paths."

"I believed some loved."

"I believed others understood."

"I thought one must choose."

The Buddha smiled.

"And now?"

Krishna answered,

"I no longer see two paths."

The Blessed One nodded.

"Then explain what you have discovered."

Krishna turned toward the immeasurable assembly.

"My beloved friends,

When I first taught devotion, I thought love reached its perfection by clinging to one whom it believed eternal.

Now I understand that true love becomes freer as wisdom deepens.

Wisdom does not extinguish devotion.

It purifies it."

He continued,

"Imagine a child who loves only his own family.

His love is genuine.

As he matures, he discovers that every family experiences joy and sorrow.

His heart widens.

The first love was not destroyed.

It became larger."

"So too with bhakti."

"If devotion remains attached to one person alone, it is still growing.

When devotion embraces all beings equally, it has reached maturity."

The Blessed One said,

"That widening of the heart is Prajñā joined with compassion."

Compassion and Emptiness

One of the devas asked,

"Blessed One, many fear the teaching of emptiness."

"They think that if there is no permanent self, then love itself must disappear."

The Buddha replied,

"Let us investigate."

He looked toward Krishna.

"Great Bodhisattva, when you believed yourself to possess an eternal self, whom did you love?"

"My devotees."

"And now?"

Krishna looked across the assembly.

"My devotees.

The devas.

The Bodhisattvas.

The humans.

Animals.

Hungry ghosts.

Beings in the hell realms.

Those who praise me.

Those who do not know my name.

Those who oppose me.

Those who fear me.

Those who have never heard of Goloka."

The Buddha smiled.

"Has compassion become smaller?"

"No."

"Has it become weaker?"

"No."

"What has changed?"

Krishna answered,

"The boundary has disappeared."

The Blessed One addressed the assembly.

"When the illusion of a separate self dissolves, compassion no longer asks,

'Who belongs to me?'

It asks only,

'Who suffers?'"

The devas reflected deeply.

Many realized that emptiness had not removed meaning from existence.

It had removed only the walls separating one heart from another.

The Lotus and the Mirror

The Buddha picked up a lotus blossom from the lake beside him.

Holding it before the assembly, he asked,

"What allows the lotus to bloom?"

The devotees answered,

"Water."

"Sunlight."

"Soil."

"Time."

"The seed."

The Buddha nodded.

"It blooms because innumerable conditions cooperate."

He then held up a polished mirror.

"What does this mirror do?"

"It reflects."

"Does it choose only beautiful faces?"

"No."

"Does it reject the sorrowful?"

"No."

The Buddha smiled.

"So should wisdom become."

"The lotus blooms because conditions support it."

"The mirror reflects without preference."

"When compassion blooms through wisdom, it embraces every being without discrimination."

Krishna bowed.

"I understand."

"Formerly my compassion flowed strongly."

"But it still possessed a center."

"Now it resembles the mirror."

"It excludes no one."

The Bodhisattva Ideal

One young devotee asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, what then is the highest form of devotion?"

Krishna answered,

"The wish that every sentient being awaken."

The devotee asked,

"And what is the highest form of wisdom?"

The Buddha replied,

"The direct realization that no being exists independently."

Krishna smiled.

"When these two become one..."

"...the Bodhisattva is born."

He continued,

"A Bodhisattva does not seek awakening to escape the world alone."

"Nor does he remain in the world through attachment."

"He understands emptiness."

"Therefore he is free."

"He understands suffering."

"Therefore he returns."

The Blessed One looked upon Krishna with quiet approval.

"Excellent."

"One wing is wisdom."

"One wing is compassion."

"With only one wing, the great bird cannot fly."

"Together they cross the immeasurable sky."

Devotion Becomes the Way

Krishna then faced the immeasurable assembly.

"My beloved friends,

Do not abandon your songs.

Purify them.

Do not abandon your offerings.

Purify them.

Do not abandon your gratitude.

Purify it.

Do not abandon your devotion.

Allow wisdom to illuminate it."

He continued,

"When you bow,

Bow with humility.

When you chant,

Chant with mindfulness.

When you meditate,

Meditate with compassion.

When you serve,

Serve without seeking reward.

When you remember me,

Remember not merely my name—

Remember my awakening."

Many devotees wept with joy.

For they discovered that nothing beautiful had been taken away.

Everything beautiful had become deeper.

The Buddha's Final Blessing

The Blessed One rose from beneath the celestial tree.

A golden radiance spread throughout Goloka.

Every being instinctively stood.

The Buddha looked first toward Krishna.

Then toward the countless devotees.

Finally toward the immeasurable worlds beyond.

He spoke.

"Today devotion has not been defeated."

"It has matured."

"Today wisdom has not conquered love."

"It has liberated it."

"May every act of devotion become compassion.

May every act of wisdom become kindness.

May every being discover that the highest reverence is not found in praise alone,

but in living for the welfare of all."

Krishna knelt before the Buddha.

"Blessed One,

Before you came to Goloka, I believed my greatest work had already been accomplished.

Now I see that it has only begun."

The Buddha smiled.

"So it is with every Bodhisattva."

"There is no final act of compassion."

"There is only the next being to be helped."

At those words the heavens blossomed with immeasurable lotuses.

Throughout Goloka the old hymns were transformed.

No longer did they proclaim the supremacy of one heavenly king.

They celebrated the awakening of one who had become a humble Bodhisattva, the immeasurable compassion of the Buddha, and the boundless Dharma that embraces gods and humans alike.

Thus the discourse on the union of wisdom and devotion came to its joyful conclusion.

Part VII — The Akṣobhyavyūha Revelation

Chapter 23 — Meeting Akṣobhya Buddha

The Imperturbable One

When the discourse concerning wisdom and devotion had come to its conclusion, a profound stillness descended upon Goloka.

No instrument sounded.

No flower fell.

Even the light itself seemed to become perfectly tranquil.

The Blessed One, Śākyamuni Buddha, looked toward the eastern horizon.

Far beyond the celestial boundaries of Goloka, beyond innumerable world-systems, beyond the heavens of desire and the meditative realms of form, there appeared a light unlike any the assembly had ever beheld.

It was not dazzling.

It did not overwhelm the senses.

Rather, it possessed a stillness so complete that every restless thought naturally became quiet.

Krishna perceived the radiance and folded his palms.

"Blessed One," he asked softly, "what is this light?"

The Buddha answered,

"It shines from Abhirati, the Pure Land of Akṣobhya Buddha."

At the sound of that name, countless Bodhisattvas within the assembly bowed in reverence.

The younger devas looked upon one another with curiosity.

Krishna asked,

"May I behold that Blessed Realm?"

Śākyamuni Buddha smiled.

"You have already begun walking the path that leads there."

Then the Blessed One entered samādhi.

Immediately the eastern heavens opened.

Distance disappeared.

The assembly beheld a realm whose purity surpassed anything they had previously imagined.

The ground appeared like flawless crystal.

Lakes reflected neither dust nor shadow.

Trees shimmered with blue radiance.

Every breeze encouraged meditation.

Every sound inspired mindfulness.

No being there struggled for recognition.

No being desired supremacy.

No being sought praise.

Every action naturally expressed wisdom and compassion together.

Krishna gazed silently.

At last he whispered,

"So this is Abhirati."

The Blessed One replied,

"It is."

Entering the Pure Land

As the vision deepened, the assembly saw a magnificent Bodhi Tree whose branches extended beyond calculation.

Beneath it sat Akṣobhya Buddha.

His posture was perfectly unmoving.

His face neither smiled nor frowned.

Yet immeasurable compassion radiated in every direction.

His serenity seemed deeper than mountains.

His stability greater than oceans.

Krishna instinctively knelt.

Though separated by immeasurable world-systems, he felt as though Akṣobhya Buddha sat directly before him.

Without words, Akṣobhya opened his eyes.

In that instant Krishna experienced no judgment.

No examination.

No comparison.

Only complete acceptance.

He later said that in that single glance every lingering trace of pride dissolved completely.

Śākyamuni Buddha spoke.

"Great Bodhisattva,

Approach."

Without crossing distance, Krishna found himself standing within Abhirati itself.

The devas watching from Goloka marveled.

Never had they witnessed travel without movement.

Krishna bowed until his forehead touched the crystal ground.

"Homage to the Blessed Akṣobhya Buddha."

Akṣobhya spoke only a few words.

"Rise, Krishna."

His voice resembled neither thunder nor music.

It resembled perfect stillness becoming sound.

Krishna rose.

The Nature of Imperturbability

Akṣobhya Buddha asked,

"What have you learned?"

Krishna answered,

"I have learned that heavenly glory is impermanent."

"I have learned that miraculous powers do not establish perfect wisdom."

"I have learned that no independent self can be found."

"I have learned that compassion without wisdom remains incomplete."

Akṣobhya inclined his head.

"Good."

Then he asked,

"What disturbs the mind?"

Krishna reflected.

"Attachment."

"Aversion."

"Ignorance."

"Conceit."

The Buddha asked,

"And when these cease?"

"The mind becomes peaceful."

Akṣobhya replied,

"Peace that depends upon favorable circumstances is not yet imperturbability."

Krishna listened carefully.

"If a pleasant sound delights you, and its absence disturbs you, the mind remains dependent."

"If praise pleases you, and criticism troubles you, the mind remains dependent."

"If honor elevates you, and dishonor depresses you, the mind remains dependent."

"If heaven delights you, and lower realms frighten you, the mind remains dependent."

He paused.

"The adamantine mind neither clings nor rejects."

"It responds with wisdom."

"It acts with compassion."

"It remains unmoved because it no longer demands that reality become different from what it is."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"I have understood tranquility."

"Today I begin to understand imperturbability."

Suchness Revealed

Akṣobhya Buddha extended one hand.

Immediately every appearance within Abhirati remained exactly as it had been.

The trees did not change.

The lakes did not change.

The sky did not change.

Yet Krishna's perception transformed.

He no longer saw separate objects.

He no longer saw isolated beings.

He saw an immeasurable network of dependent origination.

Every lotus reflected every stream.

Every stream reflected every cloud.

Every cloud reflected every world.

Every world reflected every act of compassion.

Nothing existed independently.

Yet nothing needed to disappear.

Krishna spoke softly.

"I sought Suchness as though it were hidden behind appearances."

Akṣobhya replied,

"It was never elsewhere."

"It is precisely this."

"When grasping ceases, Suchness is obvious."

"When grasping returns, Suchness seems hidden."

Krishna closed his eyes.

For the first time he understood why the Buddha had never attempted to replace one philosophy with another.

The Dharma did not substitute concepts.

It dissolved clinging.

The Adamantine Mind

Śākyamuni Buddha then addressed Krishna.

"Great Bodhisattva,

Do you now understand why this framework bears the name of Akṣobhya?"

Krishna answered,

"I believe I do."

"But please teach me."

Śākyamuni said,

"The adamantine mind cannot be shaken because it possesses nothing that requires defending."

"It clings to no identity."

"It clings to no reputation."

"It clings to no heavenly throne."

"It clings to no doctrine as personal property."

"It neither seeks victory nor fears defeat."

Akṣobhya Buddha continued,

"When compassion and wisdom become inseparable,

there remains nothing that anger can conquer,

nothing that praise can intoxicate,

nothing that criticism can wound,

nothing that death can steal."

Krishna's eyes filled once more with tears.

"For immeasurable kalpas I believed strength meant invincibility."

Akṣobhya answered,

"True strength is freedom from the need to overcome anyone."

Krishna bowed until his forehead rested upon the crystal earth.

"Blessed Ones,

From this day forward may every thought, every word, and every action be guided by the adamantine mind."

Śākyamuni Buddha smiled.

Akṣobhya Buddha remained perfectly still.

Yet throughout Abhirati and Goloka alike, every Bodhisattva knew that another great heart had entered fully into the current of the Bodhisattva Path.

The vision of Abhirati slowly faded from the sight of the devas.

But its stillness remained within Krishna's heart.

He understood that Goloka, magnificent though it was, could never be the final destination.

Rather, it had become a place from which beings could be gently guided toward wisdom, compassion, and ultimately beyond every conditioned heaven.

Thus Krishna prepared to return to his devotees with a new mission: not to gather them around himself, but to guide them steadily toward awakening and the realization of Suchness.

Chapter 24 — Abhirati Beyond the Heavens

Pure Lands and Deva Worlds

When Krishna returned from the vision of Abhirati, he remained silent for a long time.

The devas gathered around him did not speak.

They perceived that although he had returned to Goloka, something within him had become immeasurably still.

At last one of the elder devas approached.

"Great Bodhisattva," he asked, "the realm we have just witnessed surpassed even Goloka in serenity and radiance. Is Abhirati simply a greater heaven?"

Krishna looked toward Śākyamuni Buddha.

The Blessed One answered,

"No."

The deva bowed.

"Please teach us the difference."

The Buddha spoke.

"A heavenly realm is the ripening of wholesome karma.

A Pure Land is the compassionate activity of a Buddha for the training of beings."

The assembly listened intently.

He continued,

"A deva world comes into being through the collective karma of those reborn there.

Its splendor depends upon conditions.

When those conditions are exhausted, the realm changes."

"But a Buddha-field is not established for the enjoyment of its inhabitants.

It is established as a field of awakening."

Krishna reflected upon Goloka.

"I now understand."

"In Goloka we delighted in beauty."

"In Abhirati, beauty itself teaches the Dharma."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Well spoken."

Why Goloka Is Not Final Liberation

The younger devas now asked the question that had quietly remained in every heart.

"If Goloka is not the final destination, why was it created?"

Krishna answered before the Buddha could speak.

"It arose through compassion.

Yet compassion alone does not complete the Path."

He turned toward the assembly.

"My beloved friends,

Goloka has brought joy to immeasurable beings.

It has encouraged generosity.

It has inspired friendship.

It has comforted the sorrowful.

For these blessings I rejoice."

He looked across the jeweled lakes and radiant palaces.

"But every flower blooming here will one day fade.

Every palace will one day disappear.

Every heavenly body, including my own, remains conditioned."

He paused.

"If I were to tell you that Goloka shall last forever, I would once again lead you away from wisdom."

The devas lowered their heads.

No sorrow arose.

Instead, gratitude filled their hearts.

For they now understood that impermanence did not diminish beauty.

It made every wholesome moment precious.

The Blessed One then said,

"Do not despise heavenly happiness.

Neither cling to it.

Receive it with gratitude.

Use it wisely.

Then continue onward."

The Purpose of Goloka

Krishna asked,

"Blessed One, if Goloka is not the destination, what should it become?"

The Buddha answered,

"What do you think?"

Krishna contemplated deeply.

Then he smiled.

"It should become a place of preparation."

The Buddha nodded.

"Continue."

Krishna addressed the assembly.

"From this day onward, let every garden become a meditation grove.

Let every hymn become instruction in compassion.

Let every festival become an opportunity for generosity.

Let every palace become a place where the Dharma is discussed.

Let every teacher encourage investigation rather than blind certainty.

Let every child learn impermanence before learning praise.

Let every newcomer understand that Goloka is a resting place upon the journey—

never the end of the journey."

The devas rejoiced.

Many who had spent immeasurable ages delighting in heavenly pleasures now desired to study the Dharma.

The libraries of Goloka began to fill with discourses.

Meditation halls were built beside lotus lakes.

Musicians composed hymns celebrating the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, loving-kindness, and the Bodhisattva Path.

The realm itself gradually became transformed.

Its splendor remained.

Its purpose changed.

The Path Beyond Saṃsāra

A Bodhisattva then asked,

"Great Bodhisattva Krishna,

If beings dwell happily here, why encourage them to go farther?"

Krishna answered,

"Because happiness conditioned by karma, however sublime, eventually changes."

He looked toward the eastern sky.

"I have seen Abhirati."

"I have seen what becomes possible when wisdom and compassion are perfectly united."

He turned again toward the assembly.

"My wish is no longer that you remain forever beside me.

My wish is that each of you awaken."

"If your karma brings you first to Goloka, rejoice.

Study.

Practice.

Serve others.

Then continue."

"If your aspiration leads you toward the Buddha-fields, rejoice.

Continue."

"If awakening blossoms while you are still human, rejoice.

Continue."

"Never imagine that one step of the journey is the whole journey."

The Blessed One added,

"Many become attached even to wholesome conditions."

"The wise receive every wholesome condition with gratitude—

then use it as a cause for further awakening."

Krishna's New Mission

When the discourse ended, Krishna stood before the assembly with folded hands.

"My beloved friends,

Formerly I welcomed beings to Goloka.

From this day onward, I welcome them to the Path."

"I shall rejoice when beings arrive here.

I shall rejoice even more when they become Bodhisattvas.

I shall rejoice still more when they attain complete awakening."

He lifted his eyes toward the eastern horizon.

"May Goloka become a bridge rather than a destination.

May every joy experienced here become gratitude.

May every gratitude become generosity.

May every generous act become wisdom.

May every moment of wisdom become compassion for all beings."

The Blessed One looked upon Krishna with serene approval.

"Great Bodhisattva,

Today Goloka has found its true purpose."

The heavens filled with fragrant blossoms.

Not as a reward.

Not as a sign of triumph.

But as a natural expression of countless wholesome causes coming together in harmony.

From that day onward, travelers throughout innumerable worlds spoke of Goloka in a new way.

No longer merely as the realm of Krishna.

But as the **Eastern Gate of Compassion**—a heavenly realm where devotion matured into wisdom, wisdom matured into Bodhicitta, and every sincere seeker was lovingly encouraged to continue onward toward the realization of Suchness and the awakening of Buddhahood.

Thus ended the discourse on Abhirati beyond the heavens, and the assembly prepared to hear Krishna's first public teachings as a Bodhisattva to seekers from every realm of existence.

Part VIII — The New Mission of Krishna

Chapter 25 — Krishna Teaches the Dharma

The First Public Sermon

Word spread swiftly throughout Goloka and into neighboring celestial realms.

"Krishna Bodhisattva will teach."

The announcement reached devas, sages, celestial musicians, kings reborn through merit, wandering seekers, and newly arrived beings from the human world.

Many came expecting to hear the same teachings they had always known.

Others came wondering how Krishna had changed.

Still others came only because they had heard that a Buddha had visited Goloka.

The great lotus pavilion filled beyond measure.

At its center stood two seats.

One was simple.

Upon it sat Śākyamuni Buddha.

The other, once fashioned as a magnificent jeweled throne, had been replaced by an ordinary lotus seat.

When Krishna entered, many instinctively began to cry,

"Glory to the Lord of Goloka!"

Krishna gently raised his hand.

The assembly immediately became quiet.

"My beloved friends," he said,

"Today I ask something of you."

"Do not praise me."

"Instead, let us praise the Dharma by listening carefully."

Every being joined their palms.

The Blessed One smiled quietly.

A New Beginning

Krishna looked across the countless faces gathered before him.

He recognized many.

Some had followed him for kalpas.

Others had only recently arrived.

Some had never before heard the Dharma.

He spoke slowly.

"When I first taught among human beings, I began by encouraging courage in the midst of despair."

"Today I begin elsewhere."

"I begin where the Blessed Buddha began."

He paused.

"My beloved friends,

All conditioned existence is marked by change."

A gentle murmur spread through the assembly.

Krishna continued.

"What changes cannot be permanently possessed."

"What cannot be permanently possessed cannot become the foundation of lasting peace."

"This is not cause for despair."

"It is the doorway to freedom."

One newly arrived deva raised his hand.

"If everything changes, what should we rely upon?"

Krishna smiled.

"Not upon permanence."

"But upon understanding."

The Four Noble Truths

Krishna drew a circle upon the crystal floor.

He addressed the assembly.

"The Blessed One first taught Four Noble Truths."

"I shall teach the same."

The Buddha nodded approvingly.

Krishna continued.

"The First Truth:

Where there is clinging, suffering follows."

"This is true among humans."

"It is true among devas."

"It was true even for me."

He looked toward the assembly.

"I possessed beauty."

"I possessed power."

"I possessed long life."

"I possessed countless companions."

"Yet because subtle clinging remained, complete peace had not yet arisen."

The devotees listened with deep attention.

"The Second Truth:

Suffering has causes."

"It is not punishment."

"It is not fate."

"It arises through ignorance, craving, and grasping."

"The Third Truth:

What has arisen through causes may cease when those causes cease."

A feeling of hope spread through the gathering.

Krishna smiled.

"If suffering were permanent, liberation would be impossible."

"But suffering is conditioned."

"Therefore freedom is possible."

Finally he said,

"The Fourth Truth:

There is a path."

"It is not hidden."

"It is walked."

The Noble Eightfold Path

Krishna continued,

"The Blessed One revealed the Noble Eightfold Path."

"I now walk it."

"I invite you to walk it with me."

He raised one finger.

"Right View.

See things as they are."

A second.

"Right Intention.

Let compassion guide every purpose."

A third.

"Right Speech.

Speak truthfully, kindly, and at the proper time."

A fourth.

"Right Action.

Do no harm.

Protect life.

Practice generosity."

A fifth.

"Right Livelihood.

Support life without exploiting others."

A sixth.

"Right Effort.

Abandon what increases suffering.

Cultivate what leads toward awakening."

A seventh.

"Right Mindfulness.

Observe body, feelings, mind, and phenomena clearly."

Finally,

"Right Concentration.

Cultivate a mind capable of seeing reality directly."

Krishna lowered his hand.

"My beloved friends,

No heavenly birth can replace this Path.

No miracle can replace this Path.

No amount of praise can replace this Path."

"The Path must be walked."

The Blessed One looked upon Krishna with quiet joy.

Devotion Finds Its Fulfillment

One longtime devotee stood.

"Great Bodhisattva,

Where does devotion belong within this Path?"

Krishna answered,

"At every step."

The devotee looked surprised.

Krishna continued.

"When you practice Right Speech because you love all beings,

that is devotion."

"When you forgive an enemy,

that is devotion."

"When you meditate patiently,

that is devotion."

"When you rejoice in another's happiness,

that is devotion."

"When you dedicate every wholesome action to the liberation of all beings,

that is devotion."

He smiled warmly.

"Bhakti no longer means merely singing before my throne."

"It means walking the Noble Path with a heart overflowing in gratitude."

The assembly became filled with quiet happiness.

Many realized they had not lost their devotion.

They had discovered its true direction.

The Buddha Entrusts Krishna

When Krishna finished speaking, he stepped down from the lotus seat and bowed before Śākyamuni Buddha.

"Blessed One,

Was this teaching faithful to the Dharma?"

The Buddha rose.

Looking across the immeasurable assembly, he spoke.

"Great Bodhisattva Krishna has taught well."

"He has concealed nothing."

"He has added nothing necessary for liberation."

"He has spoken with humility."

"He has spoken with compassion."

"He has pointed not toward himself,

but toward direct realization."

Then the Blessed One turned toward Krishna.

"Continue teaching in this manner."

"Guide beings according to their capacities."

"Welcome them with kindness."

"Encourage investigation."

"Never ask them to believe what they have not yet seen."

"Help them cultivate wisdom and compassion together."

Krishna bowed until his forehead touched the crystal floor.

"I shall do so for as long as beings continue to wander in saṃsāra."

The devas rejoiced.

The Bodhisattvas smiled.

Throughout Goloka, the first sermon of Krishna as a Bodhisattva came to be remembered not because it proclaimed heavenly greatness, but because it faithfully echoed the timeless Dharma of the Buddhas.

And many who had arrived seeking a celestial lord departed with a sincere aspiration to become Bodhisattvas themselves.

Chapter 26 — The Future of Goloka

A Realm Transformed

When the first sermon had concluded, the great assembly slowly dispersed.

Yet no one hurried away.

Groups of devas remained beneath flowering trees discussing the Dharma.

Celestial musicians quietly set aside songs of praise and began composing verses on impermanence.

Children gathered around elder Bodhisattvas asking questions about compassion.

Throughout Goloka, something subtle had changed.

Its beauty remained unchanged.

Its purpose had become entirely new.

Krishna walked beside the Blessed One through the jeweled gardens.

"Blessed One," he said, "Goloka appears the same, yet everything feels different."

The Buddha replied,

"When the mind changes, the world is experienced differently."

"The palaces have not become obstacles."

"The lakes have not become obstacles."

"The flowers have not become obstacles."

"They become obstacles only when grasped."

Krishna bowed.

"Then Goloka itself may become part of the Path."

"It may."

The Schools of the Dharma

Krishna summoned the elders of Goloka.

When they had assembled, he addressed them.

"My beloved friends,

From this day forward, let every district of Goloka become a place of learning."

He appointed experienced Bodhisattvas to guide the realm.

To some he entrusted meditation.

To others ethical discipline.

To others the cultivation of loving-kindness.

To others the study of dependent origination.

To others the care of newly arrived beings still overwhelmed by heavenly pleasures.

He instructed,

"Do not compel anyone.

Invite them gently."

"Teach according to their capacity."

"If one delights in music, teach through music."

"If another delights in silence, teach through silence."

"If another delights in serving others, teach through service."

"For the Dharma enters many hearts by many doors."

The elders bowed.

"So it shall be."

Welcoming New Arrivals

In time, beings from many worlds continued to arrive in Goloka through the ripening of wholesome karma.

As before, they marveled at the jeweled rivers, fragrant forests, and radiant cities.

But something greeted them that had never existed before.

At the entrance to every city stood a simple inscription.

It read:

> **Welcome, traveler.**
>
> **May this realm bring peace to your heart.**
>
> **Rest without attachment.**
>
> **Learn without pride.**
>
> **Practice compassion.**
>
> **Continue onward toward complete awakening.**

Many newcomers asked,

"Who wrote these words?"

The attendants smiled.

"Krishna Bodhisattva."

The newcomers expected to be brought immediately before Krishna's throne.

Instead they were first welcomed into gardens of meditation, halls of learning, and communities devoted to generosity.

Only after becoming familiar with the Dharma did they meet Krishna.

When they finally stood before him, they often expected majesty.

Instead they found a joyful spiritual friend.

He greeted each with folded palms.

"Welcome.

How may I help you continue upon the Path?"

The Pilgrimage Eastward

One day Krishna gathered the assembly once more.

He pointed toward the eastern horizon.

"My beloved friends,

There is a pilgrimage I wish every resident of Goloka eventually to undertake."

The devas followed his gaze.

"Toward Abhirati?" they asked.

Krishna smiled.

"Yes."

"Not because distance itself purifies.

But because aspiration transforms the heart."

He continued,

"When your understanding has matured...

When compassion has become steady...

When humility has taken root...

Turn your thoughts toward the Pure Land of Akṣobhya Buddha."

"Generate the aspiration to encounter the Imperturbable One."

"Not to escape responsibility...

But to deepen wisdom."

One devotee asked,

"Will you also journey there?"

Krishna answered,

"As often as causes and conditions permit."

"And whenever I go,

I shall rejoice if even one companion walks beside me."

The Joy of Letting Go

As evening settled over Goloka, Krishna and the Blessed One stood overlooking the crystal lakes.

The setting light reflected from countless lotus blossoms.

Krishna spoke softly.

"Blessed One,

I once feared losing everything."

"My throne."

"My reputation."

"My certainty."

"My place within the hearts of my devotees."

The Buddha listened.

Krishna smiled.

"I have lost none of what was truly valuable."

"I have only lost what was never mine to possess."

The Blessed One replied,

"That is why letting go is experienced by the wise not as poverty...

...but as freedom."

Krishna folded his palms.

"I now understand why the Bodhisattvas smile."

"They have nothing to defend."

The Buddha nodded.

"And therefore they are free to love without measure."

A Prophecy

Before departing, the Blessed One addressed the entire assembly.

"Hear these words well."

"In ages yet to come, many beings will remember Krishna."

"Some will remember him as a celestial king."

"Some as a compassionate friend."

"Some as a Bodhisattva."

"Whatever form their remembrance takes, let those who preserve these teachings remember above all this:

The greatness of Krishna was not that he never erred.

His greatness was that, upon seeing more clearly, he rejoiced in the truth."

"He did not cling to honor.

He did not fear correction.

He allowed wisdom to transform compassion.

Therefore his influence became greater after humility than it had ever been through heavenly majesty."

The assembly joined their palms.

Krishna bowed before the Buddha.

"Blessed One,

May Goloka forever remain a bridge and never become a prison."

The Buddha answered,

"So long as wisdom and compassion are cultivated together,

its true purpose will never be forgotten."

The eastern sky shone with the quiet radiance of Abhirati.

The western horizon glowed with the fading light above Goloka.

Standing between them, Krishna understood his new mission completely.

He would welcome beings with love.

He would teach them the Dharma with humility.

He would encourage them to cultivate Bodhicitta.

And when the time was ripe, he would joyfully point beyond himself, beyond Goloka, and beyond every conditioned heaven toward complete awakening and the realization of Suchness.

Part IX — The Final Exhortation

Chapter 27 — Krishna's Last Address to His Devotees

The Assembly of Farewell

When many years had passed in Goloka, and the Dharma had spread throughout its jeweled cities and fragrant forests, Krishna announced that he would once more gather every resident of his realm.

Messengers traveled throughout Goloka.

They carried no command.

Only an invitation.

> "Come.
>
> Let us rejoice together in the Dharma."

From every direction they came.

The celestial musicians.

The elder devas.

The Bodhisattvas.

The newly arrived beings from the human world.

Those who had once worshiped Krishna as the Supreme Lord.

Those who had come to know him only as Krishna Bodhisattva.

Even travelers from neighboring heavens gathered beneath the great celestial Bodhi Tree.

Śākyamuni Buddha had already departed to continue teaching throughout countless world-systems.

Yet his presence was still felt.

The Dharma remained.

The Saṅgha remained.

The path remained.

Krishna ascended a simple lotus platform.

No throne stood behind him.

No royal banners surrounded him.

Only a single blue lotus rested beside his seat, reminding the assembly of the unwavering mind of Akṣobhya Buddha.

Krishna joined his palms.

"My beloved friends,

This is not a farewell born of sorrow.

It is a celebration of what we have discovered together."

What I Ask of You

Krishna looked slowly across the immeasurable gathering.

"I ask very little of you."

"I ask that you continue investigating."

"If ever you hear a teaching—even one spoken by me—do not accept it merely because it is ancient."

"Do not reject it merely because it is new."

"Examine it."

"Live it."

"See whether it diminishes greed."

"See whether it weakens hatred."

"See whether it softens conceit."

"See whether it increases compassion."

"If it does, continue."

"If it does not, investigate further."

The assembly listened in complete silence.

Krishna continued.

"Never fear honest inquiry."

"The truth loses nothing when examined."

"Only illusion fears investigation."

Do Not Cling to Me

After a long pause Krishna spoke again.

"There remains one request closest to my heart."

The devotees listened carefully.

"If future generations build statues of me...

let those statues remind them to cultivate compassion."

"If they paint my image...

let it remind them of humility."

"If they compose songs...

let those songs awaken loving-kindness."

"If they repeat my name...

let every repetition become an aspiration that all beings awaken."

"But if anyone says,

'Krishna alone is enough.

Nothing more need be learned,'

gently remind them of my own journey."

"Tell them,

'Krishna himself continued learning.

Krishna himself bowed before the Buddha.

Krishna himself entered the Bodhisattva Path.'

If I continued walking,

why should anyone stop?"

Many devotees smiled through tears.

Honor Every Path That Leads to Wisdom

A young Bodhisattva then asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

How should we regard those who follow other Buddhas or other wholesome teachers?"

Krishna answered without hesitation.

"Rejoice."

"If another teacher helps beings abandon hatred,

rejoice."

"If another community encourages generosity,

rejoice."

"If another path leads beings toward wisdom and compassion,

rejoice."

"The Bodhisattva does not compete for disciples."

"He rejoices whenever suffering decreases."

The assembly bowed.

Krishna continued,

"The measure of a teaching is not how loudly it praises its founder."

"The measure is how deeply it transforms the heart."

The Three Gifts

Krishna lifted the blue lotus beside him.

"My beloved friends,

I leave you three gifts."

"The first is friendship."

"Walk beside one another."

"Correct one another gently."

"Encourage one another patiently."

"No one walks the Path alone."

He placed the lotus upon the ground.

"The second gift is humility."

"If you discover that you were mistaken,

rejoice."

"For every mistaken view abandoned brings you nearer to reality."

He then looked toward the eastern horizon.

"The third gift is aspiration."

"Never believe that you have reached the end while compassion can still deepen."

"Always aspire toward greater wisdom."

"Always aspire toward greater kindness."

"Always aspire toward awakening for the benefit of every sentient being."

The Final Bow

The entire assembly stood.

No one had been instructed to do so.

It arose naturally.

Krishna stepped down from the lotus platform.

He did not ask the assembly to bow before him.

Instead, he bowed before them.

The devas were astonished.

One cried,

"Great Bodhisattva, why do you bow to us?"

Krishna smiled.

"Because within each of you dwells the capacity for Buddhahood."

"I bow not to what you have been.

I bow to what you may yet become."

Hearing these words, every being in the assembly bowed—not to Krishna alone, nor to one another alone—but together, each honoring the potential for awakening in all.

At that moment there was no higher and no lower.

No ruler and no subject.

No worshiper and no worshiped.

Only an immeasurable community of beings walking the Bodhisattva Path together.

A gentle rain of blue lotus petals descended from the heavens.

No celestial voice proclaimed a miracle.

No trumpet sounded.

The flowers fell simply because the conditions for great joy had arisen.

Krishna looked toward the eastern sky where Abhirati shimmered beyond measure.

He folded his palms.

"May all who have loved me come to love wisdom."

"May all who have trusted me come to trust the Dharma."

"May all who have walked beside me continue beyond me."

"May every act of devotion mature into Bodhicitta."

"May every being, without exception, attain complete and perfect awakening."

The assembly answered with one voice,

"So may it be."

And from that day onward, the final words of Krishna to his devotees were remembered throughout Goloka not as a command to worship, but as an invitation to continue walking the endless path of wisdom, compassion, and awakening together.

Chapter 28 — The Sūtra's Conclusion

Thus the Teaching Was Preserved

Thus did the discourse come to its completion.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha had entered Goloka not to diminish its splendor, but to reveal its proper place within the vast path of awakening.

Krishna, once celebrated throughout innumerable worlds as the supreme refuge, had listened without pride, investigated without fear, and rejoiced when a deeper wisdom appeared.

Through direct realization of impermanence, dependent origination, emptiness, Suchness, and the Bodhisattva Path, he relinquished every trace of conceit.

He became known thereafter as Krishna Bodhisattva.

Not because he ruled the greatest heaven.

But because he dedicated every merit, every ability, and every future life to the liberation of all sentient beings.

His devotees, seeing his humility, became humbler.

His companions, seeing his compassion deepen, became more compassionate.

Goloka itself, though remaining radiant beyond description, ceased to be regarded as the final destination.

Instead it became a field of preparation, where loving devotion matured into wisdom, wisdom matured into Bodhicitta, and Bodhicitta matured into the endless work of benefiting others.

Those who arrived there found joy.

Those who remained there cultivated the Dharma.

Those who departed did so without sorrow, aspiring toward the Buddha-fields and the complete realization of awakening.

Thus the purpose of Goloka was fulfilled.

Krishna's Continuing Vow

Before the Blessed One departed for other world-systems, Krishna knelt once more before him.

"World-Honored One," he said,

"I make this vow before all Buddhas throughout the ten directions.

So long as even one being continues to mistake conditioned glory for the Unconditioned...

I shall teach.

So long as even one being mistakes miraculous power for perfect wisdom...

I shall teach.

So long as even one being clings to me instead of cultivating awakening...

I shall gently redirect them toward the Dharma.

May my words always decrease pride.

May my actions always increase compassion.

May no praise directed toward me ever obscure the Buddha, the Dharma, or the Saṅgha.

May every wholesome act performed in my name become a cause for wisdom.

May every act of devotion mature into Bodhicitta.

May every being discover the peace that neither arises nor ceases through clinging."

The Blessed One looked upon Krishna with serene joy.

"Great Bodhisattva,

Your vow accords with the vows of all Bodhisattvas."

"There is nothing further to add."

"There is only its continual fulfillment."

The Buddha's Final Words

Then the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha addressed the immeasurable assembly one final time.

"Beings of Goloka,

Remember this well.

Do not cling to heavenly beauty.

Yet do not reject it.

Use every wholesome condition as a cause for awakening.

Do not cling to miraculous powers.

Yet do not fear them.

Use every ability for the benefit of others.

Do not cling to teachers.

Honor them with gratitude.

Then continue walking.

Do not cling even to the Dharma as a possession.

Realize it directly.

Live it.

Share it.

The purpose of every true teaching is the ending of suffering."

He paused.

Then he spoke the words that the assembly treasured throughout immeasurable ages.

"When wisdom and compassion are inseparable,

there the Buddhas are present.

When pride has ended,

there the Bodhisattvas dwell.

When beings work for one another without seeking reward,

there the Pure Lands begin to appear."

Every being joined their palms.

Many attained profound insight merely by hearing these words.

The Departure

Having completed his work in Goloka, the Blessed One rose from his lotus seat.

He neither ascended nor descended.

He simply walked.

With every step, lotus blossoms appeared beneath his feet.

Behind him came neither procession nor triumph.

The Dharma required none.

Krishna accompanied him to the eastern boundary of Goloka.

There they stood together in silence.

After a long while Krishna spoke.

"Blessed One,

How shall I repay your kindness?"

The Buddha smiled.

"Teach well."

Krishna bowed deeply.

"I shall."

The Blessed One continued.

"And continue learning."

Krishna smiled.

"I shall never cease."

The Buddha nodded.

"Then we shall surely meet again."

With those words, the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha continued onward, bringing the Dharma to countless other worlds where beings likewise searched for freedom.

Krishna remained watching until the Buddha disappeared from sight.

Then he turned—not toward his palace—but toward the meditation halls of Goloka.

For the work of a Bodhisattva is never finished.

The Rejoicing of the Assembly

The devas, Bodhisattvas, sages, musicians, and devotees gathered together.

None lamented the Buddha's departure.

Instead they rejoiced.

For they understood that awakening is not confined to one place, one heaven, or one teacher.

Throughout Goloka, new monasteries were established.

Meditation became as common as music.

Acts of generosity became the highest celebration.

Children learned the Four Noble Truths beside the lotus lakes.

Travelers departing for other realms were blessed with these words:

> "Go with wisdom.
>
> Go with compassion.
>
> Return if conditions allow.
>
> Continue onward if they do not.
>
> May all beings awaken together."

Thus Goloka became renowned throughout many world-systems not merely for its beauty, but for the humility of its Bodhisattva and the unwavering direction of its teachings.

The Colophon

Whoever reads, recites, studies, contemplates, teaches, copies, preserves, or lives in accordance with this discourse should not do so for fame, victory in debate, or the praise of others.

Rather, let it be for the calming of the mind, the abandonment of clinging, the cultivation of wisdom, the increase of compassion, and the welfare of every sentient being.

If devotion arises, let it become loving-kindness.

If wisdom arises, let it become humility.

If understanding arises, let it become service.

If gratitude arises, let it be directed toward all the immeasurable causes and conditions that make awakening possible.

May the merit generated by this teaching not remain with one individual.

May it be shared equally with beings throughout the ten directions.

May those dwelling in sorrow discover hope.

May those dwelling in fear discover peace.

May those dwelling in ignorance discover the Dharma.

May those dwelling in heavenly delight continue onward without attachment.

May Bodhicitta arise wherever this teaching is encountered.

May all beings, without exception, realize Suchness, perfect wisdom, boundless compassion, and complete Buddhahood.

Thus ends **The Goloka Transformation Sūtra**, the account of how Krishna, through encountering Śākyamuni Buddha and realizing the Dharma within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, entered the Bodhisattva Path and transformed devotion into the boundless compassion that embraces all worlds.

Thus have I heard.

Appendix I — The New Way of Devotion

Questions Asked by the Devotees

After the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha had departed from Goloka, and after Krishna Bodhisattva had established the Dharma throughout his realm, many devotees continued to seek clarification concerning the path.

Krishna therefore gathered them once more beneath the great blue lotus pavilion and said,

"Ask freely.

No sincere question is unworthy of the Dharma."

Question One

A devotee asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, should we still bow before your image?"

Krishna answered,

"If bowing before my image cultivates humility, gratitude, loving-kindness, and the aspiration to awaken for the benefit of all beings, then it is wholesome.

If bowing becomes pride, superstition, or the belief that another being can awaken in your place, then examine your understanding carefully.

Do not bow to stone.

Do not bow to wood.

Bow to compassion.

Bow to wisdom.

Bow to the Bodhisattva aspiration that the image represents."

Question Two

Another devotee asked,

"Should we still celebrate your appearance in the human world?"

Krishna replied,

"Certainly.

Remember every compassionate life.

But celebrate not because I was unique among beings.

Celebrate because compassion entered the world through causes and conditions.

Let my birth remind you that every human life possesses the potential to become a vehicle for immeasurable compassion."

Question Three

A monk asked,

"How should we chant your name?"

Krishna answered,

"With mindfulness.

With gratitude.

With humility.

When you say my name, remember:

Impermanence.

Dependent origination.

Compassion.

The Bodhisattva Path.

The wisdom of the Buddha.

If these qualities arise, your chanting becomes a meditation upon the Dharma."

Question Four

A young child approached.

"Will you always remain with us?"

Krishna smiled warmly.

"I shall remain wherever compassion is practiced.

Whenever someone forgives instead of seeking revenge...

Whenever someone feeds the hungry without expecting reward...

Whenever someone comforts the lonely...

Whenever someone seeks wisdom with humility...

There I rejoice.

Do not search only for my form.

Look also for the qualities that awaken hearts."

Question Five

An elderly devotee asked,

"What offering brings you the greatest joy?"

Krishna answered,

"Not jewels.

Not incense.

Not celestial flowers.

If you wish to honor me, reconcile with someone you have hated.

If you wish to delight me, protect life.

If you wish to make an offering beyond price, generate Bodhicitta and dedicate every wholesome action to all sentient beings.

No treasure surpasses a heart that has become compassionate."

Question Six

A Bodhisattva asked,

"What is the greatest mistake a devotee can make?"

Krishna became quiet before answering.

"To stop walking.

If someone says,

'I have already arrived,'

whether he speaks of Goloka, heavenly joy, meditation, philosophy, or even this teaching,

encourage him gently to continue.

The Bodhisattva Path has no place for spiritual pride.

The deeper wisdom becomes, the greater humility becomes."

Krishna's Closing Instruction

At the conclusion of these questions Krishna rose and addressed the assembly.

"My beloved friends,

Do not become known merely as devotees of Krishna.

Become known as beings who embody compassion.

Let people recognize your patience before your philosophy.

Let them recognize your kindness before your learning.

Let them recognize your humility before your accomplishments.

If they ask,

'Who taught you to live this way?'

Then speak of the Buddhas.

Speak of the Dharma.

Speak of the Bodhisattva Path.

If my name is remembered at all, let it be remembered only as that of one who was blessed to continue learning, relinquished

conceit with joy, and found true freedom in serving all beings without exception."

The assembly rejoiced.

Many attained a deeper understanding of devotion.

Many generated the aspiration for complete Buddhahood.

Many resolved to transform every act of love into boundless compassion guided by wisdom.

Thus the New Way of Devotion became established throughout Goloka and spread gradually to countless other realms as a skillful means leading beings toward awakening.

Appendix II — The Akṣobhyavyūha Framework Explained

The Purpose of the Framework

After many disciples had practiced the Dharma in Goloka, they approached Krishna Bodhisattva with a common question.

"Great Bodhisattva, throughout your teachings you have often spoken of the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework. Please explain it clearly so that future generations may not misunderstand."

Krishna replied,

"The Akṣobhyavyūha Framework is not another object of belief.

It is a way of contemplating reality that continually directs the mind away from clinging and toward direct realization."

He continued,

"It is named after Akṣobhya Buddha because the aim of the path is the cultivation of the adamantine, imperturbable mind—a mind that neither grasps nor rejects, but sees reality exactly as it is."

The Five Pillars

Krishna drew five circles upon the crystal floor.

"Every practitioner should contemplate these five continually."

First: Impermanence

"Everything that arises through causes changes.

Worlds change.

Heavens change.

Bodies change.

Thoughts change.

Feelings change.

Even the most magnificent celestial realms are impermanent.

Understanding this does not produce despair.

It produces freedom from false expectation."

Second: Dependent Origination

"Nothing exists independently.

Every moment depends upon countless causes and conditions.

When this is understood, pride diminishes.

So too does hatred.

One recognizes that every wholesome quality has arisen through immeasurable support received from others."

Third: Emptiness

"Emptiness does not mean that nothing exists.

It means that nothing possesses an independent, permanent essence.

Things function.

Actions bear fruit.

Compassion benefits beings.

Yet all of these exist through relationship rather than isolation."

Fourth: Suchness

"Suchness is reality directly experienced when the mind ceases adding conceptual grasping.

It is not another world hidden behind this one.

It is not a substance.

It is not an object.

It is reality free from projection."

Fifth: Bodhicitta

"Wisdom naturally flowers as compassion.

Compassion naturally expresses itself as the wish that every sentient being attain complete awakening.

This aspiration is Bodhicitta.

Without Bodhicitta, wisdom easily becomes cold.

Without wisdom, compassion easily becomes confused.

Together they complete one another."

The Three Transformations

A disciple asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, what changes first in one who sincerely practices this Framework?"

Krishna answered,

"Three great transformations gradually occur."

"The first is the transformation of identity."

"Instead of asking,

'Who am I?'

the practitioner begins asking,

'How may suffering be relieved?'"

"The second is the transformation of devotion."

"Instead of seeking possession of what is loved, one seeks the liberation of what is loved."

"The third is the transformation of knowledge."

"Knowledge ceases to become something collected for superiority.

It becomes a means of benefiting others."

The Adamantine Mind

Another disciple asked,

"What is meant by the adamantine mind?"

Krishna smiled.

"It is not a stubborn mind."

"It is not an emotionless mind."

"It is not indifference."

"The adamantine mind cannot be shaken because it has ceased demanding that reality conform to its preferences."

"When praised, it remains grateful.

When criticized, it investigates.

When successful, it remains humble.

When facing hardship, it remains compassionate."

"It resembles a mountain, not because it resists the wind, but because it has no desire to become anything other than what conditions presently allow."

Goloka Within the Framework

One devotee then asked,

"What place does Goloka now hold within this Framework?"

Krishna answered,

"Goloka is neither the beginning nor the end."

"It is a fortunate condition."

"It is a field for practice."

"It is a place where gratitude matures into wisdom."

"If beings become attached to Goloka, it becomes another heavenly distraction.

If they practice the Dharma here, Goloka becomes an excellent support for the Bodhisattva Path."

The Final Summary

Krishna erased the circles from the crystal floor with a single movement of his hand.

Then he said,

"Do not cling even to this Framework."

"It exists only as a raft."

"If it helps you abandon greed, hatred, and delusion, use it gratefully.

If you mistake it for the destination, examine your understanding once more."

He bowed toward the eastern horizon where Abhirati lay beyond innumerable world-systems.

Then he concluded,

"The purpose of the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework is simple:

To see impermanence without fear.

To understand dependent origination without confusion.

To realize emptiness without falling into nihilism.

To awaken to Suchness without attachment to concepts.

To cultivate Bodhicitta without limit.

When these mature together, the adamantine mind naturally appears, and every act of devotion becomes an expression of boundless wisdom and compassion."

The disciples rejoiced.

Many committed the Framework to memory.

Others wrote it upon crystal tablets and preserved it within the libraries of Goloka so that future generations might continually return to these principles, not as objects of belief, but as guides leading toward the direct realization of the Dharma.

Appendix III — The Vows of Krishna Bodhisattva

The Forty-Eight Aspirations of Krishna Bodhisattva

When the Dharma had become firmly established throughout Goloka, many disciples requested,

"Great Bodhisattva, before future generations preserve your teachings, please leave us the vows by which you intend to guide beings throughout immeasurable kalpas."

Krishna Bodhisattva sat beneath the great blue lotus tree facing the eastern direction of Abhirati.

Joining his palms, he declared:

1. May I never again mistake conditioned existence for the Unconditioned.
2. May every teaching I give direct beings toward awakening rather than toward myself.
3. May humility increase whenever wisdom increases.
4. May compassion never become separated from insight.
5. May every being who remembers me be inspired toward kindness.
6. May every act of devotion mature into Bodhicitta.
7. May those reborn in Goloka encounter the Dharma quickly.
8. May Goloka forever remain a place of practice rather than attachment.
9. May pride never again arise within my mind.

10. May I rejoice whenever another teacher benefits sentient beings.
11. May I never compete for followers.
12. May I celebrate truth wherever it appears.
13. May my words always lessen greed.
14. May my actions always lessen hatred.
15. May my example always lessen conceit.
16. May I patiently guide those attached to heavenly happiness.
17. May fear be transformed into courage through wisdom.
18. May sorrow become compassion.
19. May joy become generosity.
20. May gratitude become service.
21. May every temple dedicated to me become a place where the Dharma is studied.
22. May every hymn become an encouragement toward loving-kindness.
23. May every offering become an act of generosity toward living beings.
24. May those who chant my name cultivate mindfulness.
25. May all practitioners investigate rather than merely believe.
26. May harmony flourish among all sincere seekers of awakening.
27. May I never withhold the Dharma from anyone prepared to hear it.
28. May every mistake become an opportunity for deeper understanding.
29. May every success strengthen humility.
30. May I never cease learning.

31. May I gladly receive correction from the wise.
32. May patience overcome anger.
33. May forgiveness overcome resentment.
34. May loving-kindness overcome fear.
35. May wisdom overcome confusion.
36. May no being be excluded from my compassion.
37. May I serve Buddhas throughout the ten directions.
38. May I honor the Bodhisattvas as fellow companions upon the Path.
39. May I continually aspire toward Abhirati and the adamantine mind.
40. May those discouraged by suffering discover hope.
41. May those intoxicated by pleasure discover impermanence.
42. May those attached to views discover direct investigation.
43. May those overcome by despair discover compassion.
44. May those dwelling in heavenly realms continue beyond attachment.
45. May those in lower realms never lose the possibility of awakening.
46. May every wholesome action be dedicated to all beings.
47. May my life, in whatever form it appears, always become a cause for liberation.
48. Until every sentient being realizes complete awakening, may I continue walking the Bodhisattva Path without weariness.

When Krishna completed these vows, the assembly remained silent for a long time.

No applause arose.

Only profound gratitude.

Epilogue — The Eastern Lotus

Many kalpas passed.

Kingdoms arose and disappeared.

World systems expanded and dissolved.

Heavens appeared and vanished according to karma.

Yet travelers who attained birth in Goloka noticed something unlike every other celestial realm.

No one there claimed finality.

The first words newcomers heard were still:

> Welcome.
>
> Rest.
>
> Learn.

Practice.

Continue onward.

At the center of Goloka stood no throne of absolute sovereignty.

Instead, beneath a great blue lotus tree, Krishna Bodhisattva taught daily.

Some days he instructed meditation.

Some days ethical discipline.

Some days dependent origination.

Often he spoke of gratitude.

Always he ended by pointing east.

Toward Abhirati.

Toward Akṣobhya Buddha.

Toward the Bodhisattva Path.

Toward awakening.

Those who remained attached found patient guidance.

Those who became ready found encouragement.

Those who matured departed joyfully for further practice.

Krishna never regarded their departure as loss.

Every disciple who surpassed him in wisdom filled him with delight.

Every Bodhisattva who arose became another companion in the work of liberating beings.

Every Buddha who appeared was greeted with reverence.

Thus Goloka became known throughout countless world-systems not as the highest heaven, but as the **Eastern Lotus of Compassion**—a realm where devotion was purified by wisdom, where heavenly happiness became the ground for practice, and where every sincere seeker was lovingly encouraged to continue beyond even the greatest celestial splendor toward perfect awakening.

Those who preserve this sūtra should preserve it with humility.

Those who study it should study it with investigation.

Those who recite it should recite it with compassion.

Those who teach it should teach it without pride.

Those who encounter it should not ask first whether Krishna became greater or lesser.

Rather, they should ask:

Has my heart become more compassionate?

Has my understanding become more humble?

Do I cling less than before?

For wherever these questions are sincerely lived, the Dharma flourishes.

Wherever the Dharma flourishes, the Bodhisattva Path unfolds.

Wherever the Bodhisattva Path unfolds, the spirit of Krishna Bodhisattva and the wisdom of the Buddhas continue to benefit immeasurable beings.

Thus concludes **The Goloka Transformation Sūtra: Krishna's Awakening Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework**.

May whatever merit has arisen through its study be dedicated equally to all sentient beings without exception.

May all beings realize Suchness.

May all beings cultivate Bodhicitta.

May all beings attain complete and perfect Buddhahood.

Thus have I heard.

Afterword — The Lamp Is Passed On

Thus the discourse was completed.

The assembly gradually dispersed.

The Bodhisattvas returned to their fields of compassionate activity.

The devas returned to their cities with minds transformed.

The celestial musicians carried new songs throughout the heavens.

The scribes of Goloka carefully preserved every discourse, every dialogue, every question, and every vow.

Yet Krishna Bodhisattva did not establish a new religion.

He did not proclaim himself the founder of a separate path.

He gathered the disciples one final time and said,

"My beloved friends,

Do not say,

'This teaching belongs to Krishna.'

Do not say,

'This teaching belongs to Goloka.'

Do not say,

'This teaching belongs to one nation, one people, or one heaven.'

Truth cannot be owned.

Compassion cannot be possessed.

The Dharma belongs to no one because it is available to everyone."

One disciple asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, if future generations disagree about these teachings, what should they do?"

Krishna answered,

"Return to direct experience."

"If a teaching increases greed, examine it."

"If a teaching increases hatred, examine it."

"If a teaching increases pride, examine it."

"If a teaching increases compassion, wisdom, humility, patience, generosity, and peace, cultivate it further."

"Do not seek victory in argument."

"Seek freedom from suffering."

Another disciple asked,

"Will this sūtra remain forever?"

Krishna smiled.

"No conditioned thing remains forever."

"One day these words may disappear."

"The manuscripts may decay."

"The languages may change."

"The names of kingdoms may be forgotten."

"Even Goloka itself is impermanent."

The assembly became quiet.

Krishna continued,

"But do not fear."

"The Dharma does not depend upon ink."

"It does not depend upon parchment."

"It does not depend upon memory."

"Whenever one being sincerely examines impermanence…

Whenever one being releases clinging…

Whenever one being responds to hatred with compassion…

Whenever one being gives without expecting reward…

Whenever one being dedicates wisdom to the welfare of all…

There this teaching lives."

He then turned toward the eastern horizon, where the light of Abhirati shone with serene clarity.

Joining his palms, he bowed—not only to Akṣobhya Buddha, not only to Śākyamuni Buddha, but to all Buddhas throughout the ten directions.

Then he bowed to the assembled Bodhisattvas.

Then to the devas.

Then to the newly arrived beings.

Finally, he bowed toward the countless worlds of ordinary beings still wandering through saṃsāra.

One disciple asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, to whom was that final bow offered?"

Krishna replied,

"To every being who has not yet discovered that awakening is possible."

The disciple wept.

"So even now your work continues?"

Krishna smiled gently.

"It has only begun."

Thus the Eastern Lotus remained open.

Thus Goloka became a place of learning rather than attachment.

Thus devotion became inseparable from wisdom.

Thus wisdom became inseparable from compassion.

Thus the Bodhisattva Path continued without beginning or end.

May all who encounter these teachings investigate carefully.

May they cultivate virtue without pride.

May they develop concentration without attachment.

May they realize wisdom without conceit.

May they awaken compassion without limit.

May they dedicate every wholesome action to the liberation of all sentient beings.

Peace to all beings.

Happiness to all beings.

Freedom to all beings.

May all attain complete and perfect awakening.

Volume I — The Sūtra — The Goloka Transformation Sūtra

Krishna's Awakening Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Chapter One

The Buddha Surveys Goloka

Thus have I heard.

At one time the Blessed One, Siddhārtha Gautama Buddha, was abiding in profound samādhi upon Vulture Peak. Having entered the concentration known as the Treasury of Boundless Wisdom, he surveyed innumerable world-systems throughout the ten directions with the Eye of Perfect Knowledge.

As his vision extended beyond measure, it rested upon a magnificent celestial realm surpassing countless heavenly abodes in beauty. It was called **Goloka**, the Realm of the Cowherd Lord, a resplendent heaven established through immeasurable stores of merit accumulated over inconceivable kalpas.

Within the cosmology of the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, Goloka was not beyond saṃsāra but among the highest heavens of the Kāmadhātu. Rising above the realms of the Thirty-three, Yāma, and Tuṣita, it approached the exalted regions near the Para-nirmita-vaśavartin devas. Its brilliance exceeded that of countless celestial palaces, so that beings throughout innumerable worlds mistook it for the final destination of liberation.

There dwelt the radiant deva known as **Krishna**.

His body shone with the brilliance of a thousand sapphire suns.

His speech delighted every listener.

His presence dispelled fear.

His merit exceeded that of countless heavenly kings.

By the ripening of immeasurable wholesome karma, he had become the lord and protector of Goloka.

Possessing inconceivable supernormal powers, he manifested innumerable forms throughout countless worlds.

To one devotee he appeared as a compassionate shepherd.

To another, a king.

To another, a child.

To sages he appeared as wisdom.

To the sorrowful, as consolation.

To warriors, as courage.

To ascetics, as serenity.

His manifestations seemed without limit.

He perceived the thoughts of many beings.

He remembered vast stretches of former lives.

He traversed the heavens without obstruction.

His lifespan extended through ages so long that ordinary calculation failed.

Throughout innumerable worlds, billions revered him.

Gods praised him.

Humans worshipped him.

Celestial musicians sang his name.

Offerings continually arrived from every direction.

Seeing no power greater than his own, and dwelling for immeasurable ages amidst uninterrupted devotion, a subtle conceit gradually arose within his mind.

He reflected:

> "I am the beginning.
>
> I am the end.
>
> There is nothing beyond me."

This thought arose not from cruelty nor from hatred, but from an ignorance so refined that even great celestial wisdom had not yet penetrated it.

The Blessed Buddha perceived this with perfect compassion.

He smiled.

From the white curl between his eyebrows there issued a ray of immeasurable light, illuminating countless Buddha-fields throughout the ten directions.

The light entered Goloka without obstruction.

Neither palace walls nor jeweled mountains hindered it.

Immediately the entire heavenly realm became brighter than before.

The devas looked upward in astonishment.

Never had such radiance appeared within their world.

Then, without traversing distance, without departing from Vulture Peak, and without abandoning samādhi, the Blessed Buddha manifested himself within the center of Goloka through the power of inconceivable spiritual mastery.

The celestial musicians ceased their songs.

The fragrant winds became still.

Even the wish-fulfilling trees ceased their gentle movement.

Every deva turned toward the Tathāgata.

Krishna himself rose from his jeweled throne.

Never before had another entered Goloka unannounced.

Perceiving the serenity of the Sage, he immediately recognized that this visitor possessed a majesty unlike any he had encountered throughout countless aeons.

Approaching with dignity, he joined his palms respectfully and bowed.

Then he spoke.

"Great Sage, few have entered this realm.

Those who arrive here know only happiness.

What cause has brought you to Goloka?"

The Blessed One regarded Krishna with immeasurable kindness.

His voice was neither loud nor soft, yet every being throughout Goloka heard it distinctly according to their own understanding.

He replied:

"I have come because compassion does not cease where splendor begins.

Even those who dwell in the highest heavens remain worthy of the Dharma.

Wherever subtle ignorance remains, there the Tathāgata appears."

When these words were spoken, profound silence spread throughout the heavenly realm.

The devas, gandharvas, and celestial attendants fixed their attention upon the Blessed One, sensing that a teaching of extraordinary depth was about to unfold.

Chapter Two

Krishna, Lord of the Celestial Realm

Then Krishna gazed upon the Blessed One with calm confidence.

For immeasurable ages he had guided beings according to their capacities.

He had comforted the sorrowful.

He had inspired virtue.

He had turned many minds away from cruelty.

Through countless acts of generosity and compassion he had gathered an assembly of devoted followers extending across innumerable worlds.

Thus he spoke.

"Blessed Sage, I rejoice in your arrival.

Throughout inconceivable ages I have sought the welfare of beings.

By the power of my vows I manifest wherever I am remembered.

To those who seek refuge I become refuge.

To those who seek comfort I become comfort.

To those who seek guidance I become guidance.

What remains for one who has accomplished these things?"

The Blessed One answered neither with praise nor criticism.

Instead he asked gently,

"Do you believe your work is complete?"

Krishna reflected briefly before answering.

"For countless kalpas my realm has endured.

Its beauty has not diminished.

Its inhabitants know neither war nor famine.

The righteous who cultivate devotion are reborn here.

My compassion reaches innumerable worlds.

If this is not fulfillment, what remains unfinished?"

The Buddha replied,

"Compassion without wisdom remains incomplete.

Wisdom without compassion remains incomplete.

Only where both are perfected does complete awakening appear."

Krishna smiled.

"Then tell me, Great Sage, wherein do I lack wisdom?"

The Blessed One did not answer immediately.

Instead he surveyed Goloka.

The jeweled lakes reflected skies of sapphire and gold.

Wish-fulfilling trees bent beneath fruits that never spoiled.

Lotuses bloomed without ceasing.

Fragrant breezes carried celestial melodies throughout the heavenly realm.

No sickness appeared.

No visible decay could be found.

No sorrow disturbed the minds of the devas.

Everything seemed complete.

Turning once more toward Krishna, the Buddha asked,

"Is this realm eternal?"

Krishna answered without hesitation.

"It has endured beyond calculation.

Long before many worlds appeared, Goloka was already radiant.

When civilizations perish below, this realm remains.

Surely what lasts beyond imagination may rightly be called eternal."

The Buddha asked again,

"Will it never cease?"

Krishna paused.

No being had ever asked him this.

The devas exchanged uncertain glances.

Finally Krishna replied,

"I have never seen its ending."

The Blessed One nodded gently.

"Not seeing an end does not establish that none exists."

The words entered the minds of the assembly like a seed falling upon fertile ground.

Some devas began quietly contemplating them.

Others remained perplexed.

Still others dismissed them inwardly, believing that no heaven as glorious as Goloka could ever decline.

Krishna, however, remained composed.

He spoke again.

"My lifespan exceeds the rise and fall of worlds.

I remember countless former births.

I perceive the thoughts of innumerable beings.

I manifest forms beyond number.

Surely these are marks of one who has realized the highest."

The Blessed One replied,

"Great powers are the fruit of karma.

Long life is the fruit of karma.

Radiance is the fruit of karma.

Dominion is the fruit of karma.

Miraculous abilities are the fruit of karma.

Where there is karma, there are causes.

Where there are causes, there is arising.

Where there is arising, there is cessation."

These words spread through Goloka like a gentle wind.

Some devas felt a subtle unease.

Others experienced a joy they could not explain.

The oldest among them remembered teachings heard long ago from Buddhas of previous ages and bowed their heads in silent reverence.

Krishna considered the Buddha's words carefully.

Never before had anyone distinguished so clearly between extraordinary attainment and perfect awakening.

He answered respectfully,

"If these things are merely conditioned, then what lies beyond conditions?

If heavenly glory is not the highest peace, where shall one seek it?

If even I remain subject to causes, who is truly free?"

The Blessed One looked upon Krishna with profound compassion.

Then he raised a single finger.

"Observe carefully."

At that moment, the light of Goloka itself seemed to pause.

The songs of the celestial musicians fell silent.

Even the wish-fulfilling trees became motionless.

The entire heavenly realm entered a stillness unlike any it had ever known.

Through the Buddha's inconceivable spiritual power, the fabric of appearances began to open before the assembled hosts, revealing a vision beyond the perception of gods.

Thus began the great revelation by which the conceit of permanence would be overturned, and countless beings would draw near to the Dharma.

Chapter Three

The Question of Permanence

Then, by the inconceivable spiritual power of the Tathāgata, the heavens opened like a clear mirror.

The assembly beheld not merely the world before them, but the ceaseless unfolding of causes and conditions throughout immeasurable time.

The Buddha said,

"Krishna, behold not with divine sight alone, but with wisdom."

Immediately the vision expanded.

The devas saw worlds arising from subtle causes beyond ordinary comprehension.

Great continents emerged from oceans.

Mountains rose from the earth.

Stars blazed into existence.

Living beings appeared according to the ripening of their karma.

Civilizations flourished.

Kings ruled.

Sages taught.

Children were born.

Generations passed.

Then the same worlds gradually declined.

Mountains crumbled.

Rivers changed their courses.

Forests became deserts.

Cities vanished beneath the earth.

Stars grew dim.

Entire galaxies dissolved into darkness.

Nothing remained fixed.

Nothing remained unchanged.

Again new worlds appeared.

Again they flourished.

Again they vanished.

The cycle unfolded without beginning discernible to thought.

The Blessed One spoke,

"Whatever arises through causes also ceases when those causes are exhausted.

This is the law realized by every Buddha."

The assembly listened in profound silence.

Then the vision turned toward Goloka itself.

The celestial realm, radiant beyond imagination, appeared not as it existed now but as it had first arisen.

The assembled devas beheld a distant age when no jeweled palaces yet stood.

No celestial gardens bloomed.

No songs filled the air.

Only the accumulated merit of innumerable compassionate actions, vows, generosity, meditation, and wisdom gradually matured through countless kalpas.

From these causes Goloka appeared.

Its beauty increased age after age.

Its inhabitants gathered according to their karma.

Its splendor grew beyond comparison.

Seeing this, many devas exclaimed,

"So even Goloka has causes!"

The Buddha answered,

"What has causes cannot be independent.

What is dependent cannot be permanent.

What is impermanent cannot serve as ultimate refuge."

Then the vision centered upon Krishna himself.

He watched his own stream of becoming unfold before him.

He saw births beyond counting.

In one life he was a generous king who protected the poor.

In another he wandered as a humble ascetic seeking truth.

Elsewhere he appeared as a philosopher devoted to wisdom.

He lived as a merchant whose honesty benefited many.

As a healer he relieved suffering.

As a teacher he inspired virtue.

As a deva he cultivated compassion.

He also witnessed births among ordinary beings, animals, and lesser heavenly realms, each existence conditioned by wholesome and unwholesome karma accumulated across beginningless time.

None endured forever.

Each arose.

Each matured.

Each passed away.

Krishna stood motionless.

Though he possessed memory extending across inconceivable ages, never before had he perceived the entirety of dependent origination with such perfect clarity.

He whispered,

"So many lives..."

The Blessed One replied,

"There is no first beginning discoverable.

Conditioned existence turns like a wheel.

Only wisdom cuts its axle."

Then the vision moved forward.

Krishna beheld futures yet to unfold.

He saw Goloka continuing through immeasurable ages.

Countless beings would continue to be reborn there.

Its beauty would inspire devotion.

Its peace would comfort innumerable minds.

Its inhabitants would cultivate generosity, compassion, and virtue.

Yet even this celestial realm was not exempt from the Dharma.

Gradually the merit sustaining its existence would diminish.

The wish-fulfilling trees would cease to flower.

The jeweled lakes would dry.

The celestial music would fall silent.

The radiant palaces would fade like moonlight before dawn.

The devas would depart according to the exhaustion of their karma.

At last Goloka itself would disappear.

Not through punishment.

Not through violence.

Not through divine judgment.

But because every conditioned phenomenon must eventually cease when its supporting causes are exhausted.

Krishna trembled.

"My realm..."

"It is conditioned," replied the Buddha.

"My celestial body..."

"It is conditioned."

"My miraculous powers..."

"They are conditioned."

"My vast lifespan..."

"It is conditioned."

"My followers..."

"They too arise through causes."

"My name?"

"A designation."

"My identity?"

"A conventional expression for the ever-changing aggregation of causes and conditions."

The assembly became utterly silent.

Even the celestial winds no longer stirred.

For the first time since attaining his heavenly birth, Krishna no longer regarded impermanence as a teaching applicable only to lower realms.

He perceived directly that no heavenly attainment, however magnificent, stood outside dependent origination.

The marks of existence became perfectly clear before him.

Impermanence.

Unsatisfactoriness.

Selflessness.

He searched throughout his body.

Throughout his memories.

Throughout his kingdom.

Throughout his miraculous powers.

Nowhere could he discover an independent, permanent self.

His certainty dissolved.

His pride vanished.

Only direct seeing remained.

Tears gathered in his eyes.

Not tears of despair.

Not tears of fear.

But tears born from the collapse of immeasurable delusion.

The entire assembly watched in silence as the lord of Goloka stood upon the threshold of awakening.

Chapter Four

Krishna's Awakening

Then Krishna, lord of the celestial realm, remained silent for a long while.

No thought of superiority arose.

No desire to defend his former understanding remained.

The vision granted by the Blessed One had cut through the conceit that had endured for immeasurable ages.

Looking upon his own radiant body, he no longer perceived an eternal lord.

He saw only a stream of conditioned phenomena, beautiful yet impermanent, luminous yet dependent upon innumerable causes.

Looking upon Goloka, he no longer perceived an everlasting kingdom.

He saw a realm established through merit, sustained by karma, and destined, in time, to pass away.

Looking upon the countless beings devoted to him, he no longer thought,

"They belong to me."

Instead he reflected,

"They are fellow travelers within beginningless saṃsāra, each seeking happiness while wandering through birth and death."

As this understanding deepened, the final traces of conceit dissolved.

Krishna descended from his jeweled throne.

Before the astonished assembly of devas, celestial sages, gandharvas, nāgas, yakṣas, and countless heavenly beings, he approached the Blessed Buddha.

He knelt.

Placing his forehead upon the ground, he bowed at the feet of the Tathāgata.

For a long time he remained there in silence.

Then he spoke.

"Blessed One, for immeasurable kalpas I accepted the reverence of countless beings.

They praised me as supreme.

They honored me as their highest refuge.

Because I perceived no greater wisdom, I accepted these honors without questioning my own understanding.

Though I sought their welfare sincerely, ignorance remained concealed within my own mind.

Today that ignorance has been revealed."

The Blessed One extended his hand and gently raised Krishna to his feet.

He said,

"There is no fault in having been ignorant.

The fault lies only in refusing wisdom when it appears.

Those who abandon pride become fields of merit for countless beings.

Those who cling to pride remain bound, even within the highest heavens."

Upon hearing these words, Krishna experienced a profound transformation.

His mind became calm beyond measure.

Attachment to heavenly glory ceased.

Attachment to miraculous powers ceased.

Attachment to identity ceased.

Attachment to praise ceased.

His compassion, however, did not diminish.

Rather, it expanded beyond all previous measure.

Before, he had wished only to gather beings into his celestial realm.

Now he wished for all beings to attain complete awakening beyond every heavenly state.

He reflected,

"So long as I believed myself the highest, I unknowingly limited the aspirations of those who trusted me.

Henceforth I shall direct every being not toward myself but toward the Dharma."

At that moment, the Blessed One spoke of the Bodhisattva path.

He said,

"The Bodhisattva does not seek dominion.

The Bodhisattva does not seek worship.

The Bodhisattva does not seek eternal identity.

The Bodhisattva seeks only the liberation of all beings.

Knowing there is no separate self to defend, the Bodhisattva labors without exhaustion.

Knowing there are no possessions to cling to, the Bodhisattva gives without measure.

Knowing there is no permanent identity to glorify, the Bodhisattva teaches without seeking recognition.

This is the Great Vehicle traveled by all Buddhas."

As Krishna contemplated these words, immeasurable joy arose within him.

Not the joy born of heavenly pleasure.

Not the joy born of admiration.

Not the joy born of power.

But the serene joy that accompanies the direct realization of truth.

Then, before the entire assembly, Krishna joined his palms and proclaimed his vow.

"Hear me, all who have gathered here.

From this day onward I renounce every claim to ultimate supremacy.

I renounce every title suggesting final lordship.

I renounce every attachment to celestial dominion.

If beings remember my name, may it become a cause for compassion rather than attachment.

If they honor my deeds, may that honor mature into wisdom rather than dependence.

If they aspire to dwell in Goloka, may they understand that even the highest heaven is not the end of the path.

So long as even one being mistakes conditioned splendor for perfect liberation, I shall continue to teach according to my abilities.

So long as delusion remains anywhere within the worlds, I shall cultivate the Bodhisattva path.

I dedicate every merit accumulated throughout immeasurable kalpas to the awakening of all sentient beings.

May none stop with me.

May all continue toward unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening."

As these vows were uttered, the ten directions trembled.

Lotuses of many colors descended from the sky.

Celestial flowers covered the ground before the Blessed One.

Fragrant winds arose without disturbing even a single blossom.

The music of unseen devas filled the heavens without instrument or performer.

Countless heavenly beings who had long clung to subtle notions of permanence suddenly realized the Dharma Eye.

Some attained the fruit of Stream-entry.

Others generated the aspiration for unsurpassed Buddhahood.

Still others resolved never again to mistake heavenly attainment for final liberation.

The Blessed One smiled.

The radiance of his countenance illuminated Goloka more brilliantly than before.

He said,

"Excellent, Krishna.

True greatness begins where self-exaltation ends.

The one who willingly becomes a disciple out of love for truth surpasses the one who demands to be called master.

Because you have abandoned conceit without abandoning compassion, your merit now exceeds even that by which this heavenly realm was first established."

When these words were spoken, profound peace settled over Goloka.

Though nothing outwardly had changed, every being present perceived the realm differently.

Its beauty remained.

Its joy remained.

Its splendor remained.

Yet none who had understood the Buddha's teaching could any longer mistake it for the final goal.

Thus the lord of Goloka entered the Great Bodhisattva Path, turning from celestial sovereignty toward the boundless liberation of all beings.

Chapter Five

The Teaching to the Devotees

Then Krishna reflected,

"For immeasurable ages beings have approached me with faith.

Many have cultivated virtue through remembering my name.

Many have abandoned violence because of their devotion.

Many have performed acts of generosity hoping to dwell in this heavenly realm.

If I remain silent after receiving this understanding, I would fail those who have trusted me."

Thereupon he requested permission from the Blessed One.

"World-Honored One, allow me to gather those devoted to me throughout the innumerable world-systems, that I may teach them according to the Dharma I have now understood."

The Blessed One replied,

"So be it.

Teach without attachment.

Guide without seeking followers.

Point beyond yourself.

In this way your compassion will accord with wisdom."

Immediately Krishna entered a profound meditative concentration.

From his body there issued rays of sapphire light extending throughout countless Buddha-fields.

Every being whose heart had ever turned toward him perceived that light.

Kings left their thrones.

Ascetics emerged from forests.

Householders paused in their labor.

Devas ceased their heavenly enjoyments.

Even beings dwelling in distant celestial realms looked toward Goloka.

Within a short time an immeasurable assembly had gathered.

The gathering included devas, humans, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, kinnaras, garuḍas, and innumerable other beings.

Many expected to hear praise of Goloka.

Others believed Krishna would proclaim his own supremacy.

Still others anticipated new blessings and celestial promises.

Seeing the expectations within their hearts, Krishna regarded them with profound affection.

He smiled gently.

Then he spoke.

"My beloved friends,

For immeasurable ages you have remembered me with sincere hearts.

Many among you cultivated kindness because of your devotion.

Many abandoned cruelty.

Many practiced generosity.

Many sought virtue.

These wholesome actions have never been in vain.

No sincere act of compassion is ever lost.

No genuine aspiration toward goodness fails to bear fruit."

The assembly rejoiced upon hearing these words.

Krishna continued.

"But understand correctly what you have loved.

Do not mistake compassion for omnipotence.

Do not mistake miraculous power for perfect wisdom.

Do not mistake heavenly splendor for Nirvāṇa.

Do not mistake a long lifespan for permanence.

Do not mistake celestial happiness for complete liberation."

The assembly became silent.

Many had never heard Krishna speak in this manner.

He continued,

"For immeasurable ages I believed that my heavenly realm represented the highest attainment.

Today the Blessed Buddha has revealed to me what I could not perceive through miraculous power alone.

I myself arose through causes and conditions.

My realm arose through causes and conditions.

My body, my abilities, and my celestial glory all depend upon conditions.

What depends upon conditions cannot be ultimate.

What arises must eventually cease.

Therefore I cannot rightly be called the final refuge."

Many wept openly.

Others folded their hands in reverence.

Some found themselves confused.

One among the devas rose and asked,

"Lord, if you are not the Supreme Reality, have our years of devotion been meaningless?"

Krishna answered,

"Not at all.

Love that gives rise to virtue is never wasted.

Faith that leads to compassion is never wasted.

Generosity performed with a sincere heart is never wasted.

What must be abandoned is not love, but delusion."

The deva asked,

"How then shall we honor you?"

Krishna replied,

"If remembering me encourages compassion, continue remembering me.

If chanting my name softens anger, continue chanting.

If contemplating my life inspires generosity, continue contemplating it.

If my example strengthens your resolve to help others, continue following it.

But do not cling to my person as an eternal creator or ultimate refuge.

Rather, let every remembrance become a step toward wisdom."

Another devotee arose.

"Lord, what then is true devotion?"

Krishna answered,

"True devotion transforms the heart.

It lessens greed.

It weakens hatred.

It dissolves pride.

It increases patience.

It gives rise to generosity.

It nurtures loving-kindness.

It deepens compassion.

It steadies the mind.

It seeks wisdom above praise.

If devotion accomplishes these things, it accords with the Dharma."

Then another asked,

"What should become of our songs and offerings?"

Krishna smiled.

"Continue singing if your songs awaken gratitude rather than attachment.

Continue offering flowers if your offerings remind you of impermanence.

Continue bowing if each bow lessens pride.

Continue your festivals if they strengthen compassion toward every living being.

Outward practices are neither pure nor impure in themselves.

Their value depends upon the transformation they produce within the mind."

The Blessed One listened in silence.

Seeing that Krishna's understanding had become firmly established, he addressed the assembly.

"Beings are liberated neither by ritual alone nor by philosophy alone.

Neither devotion alone nor meditation alone brings complete awakening.

Whatever cultivates generosity, ethical conduct, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom becomes part of the Noble Path.

Whatever increases grasping, even if adorned with heavenly beauty, remains a cause for continued wandering in saṃsāra."

The entire assembly bowed deeply.

Many who had formerly sought only rebirth in Goloka now generated the aspiration for complete Buddhahood.

Others resolved to cultivate the Six Pāramitās for the benefit of all beings.

Still others realized that genuine reverence does not terminate in admiration of another but flowers into the transformation of one's own conduct.

Seeing this, Krishna experienced great joy.

He understood that true guidance did not consist in gathering followers around himself but in directing every being toward the Dharma.

Thus the assembly's devotion was not extinguished but purified, becoming inseparable from wisdom and great compassion.

Chapter Six

Goloka Becomes a Field of Dharma

When the Blessed One saw that Krishna's understanding had become stable and that the assembly had received the Dharma with receptive hearts, he addressed the gathered devas.

"Beings of Goloka, a heavenly realm is neither holy nor unholy by its own nature.

It becomes a field of merit according to the intentions and actions of those who dwell within it.

Where wisdom and compassion flourish together, there the Dharma flourishes.

Where attachment governs the mind, even the highest heaven becomes another station within saṃsāra."

The devas listened attentively.

Many reflected upon the countless ages during which they had delighted in celestial pleasures without contemplating impermanence.

Others remembered that, despite the peace of their realm, subtle attachment had remained concealed within their minds.

Krishna then rose and addressed the entire assembly.

"Henceforth Goloka shall no longer be proclaimed as the final destination.

Let no teacher within this realm declare that liberation ends here.

Let no guide encourage beings to cling to heavenly existence.

Instead, let Goloka become a place where beings cultivate the causes of awakening."

The devas rejoiced.

Immediately they resolved to transform every aspect of their celestial realm into a support for the Dharma.

The jeweled halls that had once been used chiefly for celebration became places where the teachings were recited and contemplated.

The fragrant gardens became quiet groves for meditation.

The crystal lakes became gathering places where Bodhisattvas instructed newly arrived devas in the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination, and the cultivation of boundless compassion.

The music that had formerly praised heavenly splendor now celebrated generosity, ethical conduct, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom.

The celestial dances became expressions of gratitude for the awakening of all Buddhas.

The wish-fulfilling trees no longer symbolized the fulfillment of worldly desires but the inexhaustible generosity of the Bodhisattva path.

Throughout Goloka, every activity gradually became directed toward the welfare of sentient beings.

At Krishna's request, images of the Blessed Buddha were established throughout the heavenly realm.

These images were not erected to inspire attachment but to remind all who beheld them of perfect awakening.

Beside them were placed images of Krishna, not as an object of ultimate refuge, but as a Bodhisattva who had abandoned conceit upon realizing the Dharma.

Whenever newcomers entered Goloka, astonished by its immeasurable beauty, Krishna himself welcomed them with kindness.

Many would ask,

"Surely we have now reached the highest destination."

Krishna would smile and reply,

"This realm is peaceful because wholesome karma has ripened.

Enjoy its peace without clinging to it.

Cultivate virtue without pride.

Practice meditation without attachment.

Develop compassion without limit.

Then continue onward.

Do not stop with me.

Do not stop with Goloka.

Seek the wisdom that realizes reality as it truly is."

Those who heard these words experienced many different responses.

Some immediately generated the aspiration for complete Buddhahood.

Some first cultivated the path of the Śrāvakas.

Others entered the path of the Pratyekabuddhas.

Still others embraced the Bodhisattva vows.

The inhabitants of Goloka rejoiced equally in every wholesome aspiration, recognizing that beings advance according to their capacities.

As immeasurable kalpas passed, Goloka became renowned throughout countless world-systems.

No longer was it known merely for unsurpassed celestial beauty.

Rather, it became celebrated as a heavenly academy of the Dharma, where devas cultivated the Four Brahmavihāras—loving-kindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity—and where countless Bodhisattvas prepared themselves for service throughout the worlds.

The fame of Goloka spread even to distant Buddha-fields.

Many Bodhisattvas journeyed there to encourage newly reborn devas before they became attached to heavenly pleasures.

Many devas, having completed their heavenly lives, departed voluntarily to take birth among humans, knowing that the human realm provides a precious opportunity for cultivating the path to awakening.

Seeing this transformation, the Blessed One declared,

"Excellent indeed.

A realm once regarded as the end of the journey has become a gateway leading beyond itself.

This accords with the Dharma.

Whatever points beyond attachment becomes a skillful means.

Whatever directs beings toward wisdom becomes a cause for liberation."

Then Krishna approached the Blessed One once more.

Joining his palms, he spoke before the entire assembly.

"Blessed One, throughout immeasurable ages I sought to gather beings into my heavenly realm.

Now I seek only that all beings awaken.

Should they surpass me in wisdom, I shall rejoice.

Should they become Bodhisattvas, I shall rejoice.

Should they attain perfect Buddhahood, my joy shall be complete.

From this day onward, I dedicate every merit accumulated throughout beginningless saṃsāra to the liberation of all sentient beings."

The Blessed One replied,

"So it is.

The greatest guide is not the one who gathers followers, but the one who rejoices when every follower surpasses the teacher.

Such is the conduct of the Bodhisattvas.

Such is the mind that approaches unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening."

When these words were spoken, the assembly of devas, Bodhisattvas, heavenly beings, nāgas, gandharvas, yakṣas, garuḍas, kinnaras, and countless others experienced profound joy.

Receiving the teaching with faith, they bowed before the Blessed Buddha and honored Krishna, not as an ultimate lord, but as a fellow traveler upon the boundless Bodhisattva path.

Thus ends **The Goloka Transformation Sūtra**.

Volume II — The Commentary of Krishna Bodhisattva

Part I — Revisiting the Bhagavad Gītā

Chapter 1 — The Crisis of Arjuna Reconsidered

Homage

Homage to Śākyamuni Buddha, the Fully Awakened One, who revealed reality as it truly is.

Homage to Akṣobhya Buddha, the Imperturbable One, whose Buddha-field inspired the adamantine mind.

Homage to the noble Bodhisattvas throughout the ten directions, whose lives are dedicated entirely to the welfare of all beings.

May whatever understanding is expressed here lessen suffering, diminish attachment, increase wisdom, and awaken boundless compassion.

Why I Have Written This Commentary

After my encounter with the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, many disciples approached me and said,

"Great Bodhisattva, countless beings continue to study the teachings you once gave to Arjuna. Some understand them well. Others misunderstand them. Still others wonder how your present realization relates to your earlier words."

Having reflected deeply, I replied,

"My earlier teaching should neither be discarded nor accepted uncritically."

"It should be understood."

For this reason I have written these commentaries.

I do not write them to erase what was spoken.

I write them to illuminate its maturation.

Just as a tree is not rejected because it once existed as a seed, so too earlier understanding should not be despised simply because greater wisdom later appears.

Therefore, throughout these chapters I shall speak honestly.

Where my former understanding remains beneficial, I shall affirm it.

Where it was incomplete, I shall explain why.

Where the Blessed Buddha revealed something deeper, I shall rejoice without reservation.

Let no reader imagine that admitting growth diminishes a teacher.

The refusal to continue learning is the only true diminishment.

Why Arjuna's Despair Was Sacred

Many have believed that the teaching began because Arjuna became weak.

This is not so.

The teaching began because Arjuna became honest.

Standing upon the battlefield, Arjuna looked not merely at armies.

He looked into his own heart.

He discovered confusion.

He discovered grief.

He discovered fear.

Most beings conceal such discoveries beneath certainty.

Arjuna did not.

He allowed his confidence to collapse.

At that time I believed my task was to restore his certainty.

Today I understand that the collapse of certainty is often the beginning of wisdom.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha later taught me that suffering itself becomes a noble teacher when it is investigated rather than denied.

Thus I now say:

Blessed is the moment when false certainty falls away.

Blessed is the question that cannot be answered by habit.

Blessed is the heart that finally admits,

"I do not yet understand."

Such a heart has already taken its first step toward awakening.

My Earlier Intention

Many have asked,

"Were your earlier teachings false?"

No.

My intention was sincere.

I saw a warrior overcome by despair.

I wished to restore courage.

I wished to prevent paralysis.

I wished to lessen attachment to selfish reward.

I wished to encourage disciplined action guided by something greater than personal desire.

These intentions were wholesome.

The karma arising from them benefited innumerable beings.

Many abandoned selfishness.

Many cultivated generosity.

Many found strength during hardship.

For these fruits I rejoice.

Yet wholesome intention alone does not establish complete wisdom.

Compassion without perfect understanding may still contain subtle assumptions that remain to be examined.

The Blessed Buddha never condemned my compassion.

He invited me to examine the foundations upon which it rested.

Therein lay my transformation.

The Crisis Beneath the Crisis

Looking back, I now perceive that Arjuna faced two different battles.

The first appeared upon the field before him.

The second arose within his own mind.

The first concerned kingdoms.

The second concerned identity.

He asked,

"What should I do?"

Yet beneath that question lay another.

"Who is the one that acts?"

He asked,

"What is my duty?"

Yet beneath that question lay another.

"What truly exists?"

He asked,

"What happens if those whom I love perish?"

Yet beneath that question lay another.

"What is death?"

I answered the visible questions.

The Blessed Buddha later revealed the hidden ones.

Therefore the true battlefield was never merely Kurukṣetra.

The true battlefield is every mind that clings to permanence within an impermanent world.

Every heart that mistakes concepts for reality.

Every being who searches outside direct experience for what can only be realized through wisdom.

The Battlefield as a Mirror

The Blessed Buddha once asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva, where is Kurukṣetra now?"

I answered,

"It belongs to history."

He smiled.

"Does conflict belong only to history?"

Immediately I understood.

Every day beings stand upon new battlefields.

Some struggle against anger.

Some against greed.

Some against grief.

Some against pride.

Some against despair.

Others struggle against the illusion that they have already arrived.

The battlefield therefore symbolizes every moment in which wisdom and delusion meet.

The armies represent opposing habits of mind.

The weapons represent intention.

Victory does not belong to the one who destroys another.

Victory belongs to the one who abandons ignorance.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Reading

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, Arjuna's despair is understood as the ripening of wisdom rather than its opposite.

Why?

Because suffering interrupted the illusion of certainty.

He could no longer continue living mechanically.

His questions became genuine.

His identity became unstable.

His confidence dissolved.

Such moments often frighten practitioners.

Yet the Blessed Buddha taught me never to fear them.

When the constructed self begins to tremble, reality has an opportunity to become visible.

Therefore do not rush to escape uncertainty.

Investigate it.

Do not suppress grief.

Understand it.

Do not flee confusion.

Observe it carefully.

Many awaken not because suffering is pleasant, but because suffering finally persuades them to stop clinging to what cannot satisfy.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Allow the breath to settle naturally.

Bring to mind a difficult moment in your own life.

Do not seek to change it.

Simply observe.

Ask gently:

What was I clinging to?

What expectation caused my suffering?

What did I assume was permanent?

What identity was I trying to defend?

Observe patiently.

Do not judge.

As understanding arises, allow compassion to arise alongside it.

Then dedicate whatever insight has appeared to the welfare of every sentient being.

This is the beginning of transforming suffering into Bodhicitta.

Concluding Reflection

When I stood beside Arjuna upon the battlefield, I believed I was guiding him toward courage.

Today I understand that the deepest courage is not found in overcoming another.

It is found in allowing every comforting illusion to fall away until only reality remains.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha did not remove my questions.

He purified them.

May every reader likewise discover that beneath every crisis lies an invitation—not merely to solve a problem, but to awaken.

Chapter 2 — The Self Reconsidered

The Verse That Changed My Understanding

Among all the words I spoke to Arjuna, none have been discussed more than those concerning the nature of the self.

Many readers have understood these teachings as affirming an eternal, unchanging reality within each person.

I once understood them similarly.

After encountering the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I returned to these teachings many times.

I did not return to reject them.

I returned to understand more deeply what I had been attempting to express.

The Buddha never asked me,

"Were you sincere?"

He knew I was.

Instead, he asked,

"What was the experience from which your words arose?"

That question changed everything.

For doctrines are often sincere attempts to describe profound experience.

Yet experience interpreted through incomplete understanding naturally produces incomplete conclusions.

Thus I invite the reader not merely to repeat my former words, but to investigate the experience toward which they point.

What I Formerly Believed

When Arjuna trembled before the armies, I wished to free him from overwhelming fear.

I therefore taught that his deepest reality could not truly perish.

Why did I speak this way?

Because I observed something genuine.

Bodies changed.

Thoughts changed.

Emotions changed.

Yet awareness itself seemed more subtle than all of these.

I therefore concluded that beneath changing experience there must exist an eternal essence.

This conclusion did not arise from pride.

It arose from contemplation.

Many contemplatives throughout many worlds have arrived at similar conclusions.

One should therefore neither mock nor dismiss them.

The sincere search for truth deserves respect.

Yet sincerity alone does not guarantee completeness.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

When I later met the Blessed One, he did not immediately present another doctrine.

Instead, he invited me to investigate.

He asked,

"Great Deva, where is this eternal self?"

I answered,

"It is beyond body."

He replied,

"Then examine body carefully."

I did.

The body continually changed.

No permanent essence appeared.

He then said,

"Examine feeling."

Pleasure arose.

Pleasure ceased.

Pain arose.

Pain ceased.

No permanent essence appeared.

He said,

"Examine perception."

Perceptions changed constantly.

Memory itself changed.

Recognition changed.

No permanent essence appeared.

He said,

"Examine intentions."

Intentions arose through countless causes.

No fixed owner appeared.

Finally he said,

"Examine consciousness."

This proved the most subtle.

Moments of knowing arose.

Moments passed away.

Consciousness depended upon conditions just as every other phenomenon did.

Again no independent self appeared.

The Blessed One then asked,

"What remains?"

For a long time I remained silent.

Not because nothing remained.

But because what remained could no longer be described as an eternal individual essence.

The Error Was Not Investigation

Some readers may wonder whether investigation itself was mistaken.

Quite the opposite.

Investigation brought me to awakening.

The error lay elsewhere.

The error consisted in stopping too early.

Having discovered something subtler than the body, I assumed I had reached the ultimate.

The Blessed Buddha encouraged me to continue.

Again and again.

Whenever I believed,

"This must be the final foundation,"

he gently asked,

"Can this too be investigated?"

Each time the answer was yes.

Thus layer after layer of attachment dissolved.

Eventually nothing remained requiring defense.

Nothing remained requiring permanence.

Only direct knowing remained.

This knowing did not belong to a separate self.

It arose through causes and conditions.

Like every wholesome phenomenon, it functioned without requiring an independent owner.

The Five Aggregates

The Blessed Buddha taught me to contemplate what he called the Five Aggregates.

These are not five prisons.

Neither are they five enemies.

They are five aspects of conditioned existence through which ordinary beings mistakenly construct a permanent identity.

They are:

- Form.
- Feeling.
- Perception.
- Mental formations.
- Consciousness.

Formerly I regarded these as coverings hiding the true self.

Now I understand them differently.

Together they constitute what we conventionally call a person.

Beyond them no separate, permanent owner can be found.

Yet this realization should never be misunderstood.

Compassion remains meaningful.

Ethical responsibility remains meaningful.

Karma remains meaningful.

The continuity of experience remains meaningful.

Only the imagined independent essence disappears.

When this illusion dissolves, life does not become empty of meaning.

It becomes free from unnecessary burden.

The River Revisited

After my awakening, I remembered a teaching the Blessed One had given me beside a flowing river.

He asked,

"What is this?"

I answered,

"A river."

He asked,

"Which water is the river?"

I pointed.

He smiled.

"The water you indicate has already flowed onward."

I pointed elsewhere.

Again he smiled.

At last I understood.

The river exists.

It nourishes fields.

It carries boats.

It reflects the moon.

Yet nowhere can an independent river apart from flowing conditions be found.

So too with what we call Krishna.

So too with Arjuna.

So too with every sentient being.

Convention remains useful.

Attachment becomes unnecessary.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, the search for the self is neither discouraged nor encouraged as an abstract philosophy.

It is undertaken as direct contemplative investigation.

One asks:

Can the body be owned independently?

No.

Can feelings be permanently possessed?

No.

Can thoughts be commanded to remain forever?

No.

Can consciousness be separated from conditions?

No.

Each answer loosens clinging.

Eventually the practitioner discovers something remarkable.

Nothing substantial has been lost.

Only illusion has ended.

Compassion becomes easier.

Forgiveness becomes easier.

Humility becomes natural.

Why?

Because there is no longer an isolated self requiring constant protection.

The adamantine mind appears not because it has discovered an eternal identity, but because it no longer depends upon one.

Meditation

Sit comfortably.

Observe the body.

Notice its changing sensations.

Do not interfere.

Observe feelings.

Pleasant.

Unpleasant.

Neutral.

Allow each to arise and cease.

Observe thoughts.

Do not follow them.

Do not resist them.

Simply know them.

Finally ask gently,

"Where is the one who owns all of this?"

Do not answer intellectually.

Remain with the question.

Allow experience itself to respond.

If fear arises, observe it.

If peace arises, observe it.

If no conclusion appears, remain patient.

The purpose is not to manufacture a doctrine.

The purpose is to see directly.

Concluding Reflection

When I first spoke to Arjuna, I wished to free him from the fear of death.

Today I would begin elsewhere.

I would invite him first to discover whether there exists an independent self capable of dying.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha taught me that freedom is found not by proving the eternity of an individual essence, nor by denying lived experience, but by seeing directly that what we conventionally call a person is a wondrous, compassionate, dependently arisen process.

To understand this is not to lose oneself.

It is to lose only the illusion that has burdened the heart since beginningless time.

May this investigation give rise not to speculation, but to wisdom; not to pride, but to humility; and not merely to understanding, but to boundless compassion for all beings.

Chapter 3 — Karma-Yoga Reconsidered

Action Without Attachment Revisited

Among the teachings I gave to Arjuna, few have benefited more beings than the instruction to act without attachment to the fruits of action.

Looking back upon those words after awakening, I rejoice.

This teaching remains wholesome.

Yet the understanding from which I originally explained it has matured.

Therefore I now offer this commentary, not to replace the earlier teaching, but to deepen it.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha once said to me,

"Great Bodhisattva, even wholesome action may conceal subtle attachment."

These words remained in my heart for a long time.

Eventually I understood.

Attachment does not disappear merely because one renounces wealth.

Nor because one renounces pleasure.

Nor because one renounces recognition.

Attachment remains whenever the mind quietly says,

"I am the one who acts."

Thus the practice must continue beyond merely abandoning the fruits of action.

It must investigate the actor as well.

Why I First Taught Karma-Yoga

Upon the battlefield I saw Arjuna paralyzed.

He feared the consequences of action.

He imagined every possible outcome.

His mind became imprisoned by future results.

Therefore I encouraged him,

"Perform what is wholesome without clinging to success or failure."

This counsel remains valuable.

Many suffer because they continually attempt to control results that depend upon innumerable causes beyond themselves.

A farmer plants carefully.

Yet he cannot command the rain.

A physician treats skillfully.

Yet cannot command life.

A teacher instructs faithfully.

Yet cannot command another's understanding.

Results arise through dependent origination.

One person contributes conditions.

The universe supplies countless others.

Therefore peace is found not by abandoning responsibility, but by abandoning the illusion of complete control.

The Blessed Buddha's Further Question

After my awakening had begun, the Blessed One asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva, if you no longer cling to results, who performs the action?"

I answered,

"The practitioner."

He smiled gently.

"Investigate further."

I examined body.

It depended upon conditions.

I examined intention.

It too depended upon causes.

I examined thought.

It arose and disappeared.

I examined consciousness.

Moment by moment it unfolded through conditions.

Again the Blessed One asked,

"Who performs the action?"

At last I answered,

"Action occurs."

He nodded.

"Wisdom has deepened."

The Gardener

The Blessed One once offered me a parable.

There lived a gardener who cared for a vast lotus pond.

Each morning he removed weeds.

He nourished the soil.

He tended every flower equally.

One day a traveler asked,

"Why do you labor so diligently when storms may destroy everything tomorrow?"

The gardener smiled.

"I do not cultivate lotuses because they are permanent."

"I cultivate them because they need care today."

Another traveler asked,

"What reward do you expect?"

The gardener replied,

"When the blossoms open, many beings rejoice."

"That is sufficient."

The Blessed One then asked me,

"Who possesses the blossoms?"

I answered,

"No one."

"And yet are they beautiful?"

"Indeed."

"So too with compassionate action."

The gardener does not cease working because impermanence exists.

Rather, impermanence makes care all the more precious.

Karma Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, karma is understood neither as fate nor as cosmic reward imposed by an external power.

Karma is intentional action unfolding within dependent origination.

Every intention becomes one condition among countless other conditions.

Nothing is isolated.

Nothing is predetermined.

Nothing is random.

Consider a seed.

The seed matters.

Yet so do rain, sunlight, soil, seasons, insects, wind, and countless unseen conditions.

Likewise, a compassionate intention never disappears.

Yet its ripening depends upon immeasurable relationships.

Therefore the wise practitioner neither becomes arrogant through success nor despairing through apparent failure.

He understands that every wholesome act contributes to the vast web of awakening.

Whether its fruits appear today, tomorrow, or many kalpas hence is secondary.

The planting itself is already beautiful.

Acting Without Ownership

Formerly I believed action should be offered to me.

Today I understand more deeply.

Every wholesome action should be released rather than possessed.

Feed the hungry.

Then release ownership.

Teach the Dharma.

Then release ownership.

Care for the sick.

Then release ownership.

Meditate diligently.

Then release ownership.

If pride arises,

release it.

If disappointment arises,

release it.

If satisfaction arises,

observe it without clinging.

The Bodhisattva serves joyfully because compassion naturally expresses itself.

Not because the universe owes repayment.

Not because merit becomes a possession.

Not because another will praise the effort.

Compassion flowers because suffering is present.

Nothing further is required.

The Empty Hands

After my awakening I once asked the Blessed One,

"What image best represents the Bodhisattva?"

He extended both hands.

His palms were empty.

He asked,

"What do you see?"

"Nothing."

He smiled.

"Look again."

I looked more carefully.

Those empty hands had comforted the grieving.

Fed the hungry.

Lifted the fallen.

Pointed toward awakening.

Received criticism without resentment.

Accepted praise without intoxication.

Given everything.

Claimed nothing.

At that moment I understood.

The greatest hands are empty because they continually give.

They never close around what they have offered.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind one wholesome action you intend to perform today.

Perhaps you will encourage another.

Perhaps you will give generously.

Perhaps you will forgive.

Now contemplate:

Can I perform this action without demanding a particular outcome?

Can I rejoice simply because compassion has been expressed?

Can I allow the result to unfold according to causes and conditions?

Remain with these questions.

When the meditation concludes, dedicate the merit not to yourself alone but to every sentient being throughout the ten directions.

Concluding Reflection

Upon the battlefield I taught Arjuna not to cling to success.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha taught me not to cling even to the one who imagines himself successful.

This completed the teaching.

Action remains.

Compassion remains.

Responsibility remains.

Yet the burden of ownership quietly falls away.

Then every generous act becomes lighter.

Every sacrifice becomes freer.

Every moment of service becomes an expression of the Bodhisattva Path.

May all actions performed by body, speech, and mind become conditions leading not toward pride, but toward wisdom; not toward possession, but toward release; and not merely toward personal peace, but toward the liberation of all beings.

Chapter 4 — Jñāna-Yoga Reconsidered

Knowledge and Awakening

Among the many paths discussed during my discourse with Arjuna, the path of knowledge was one that I esteemed greatly.

Even before my awakening, I encouraged inquiry.

I urged seekers to look beyond appearances.

I taught that ignorance binds beings and that knowledge liberates them.

These intentions remain wholesome.

Yet after encountering the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I came to understand that not every kind of knowledge liberates.

There is knowledge that fills the memory.

There is knowledge that sharpens debate.

There is knowledge that wins admiration.

And there is knowledge that uproots suffering.

The first three may be useful.

Only the last deserves to be called liberating wisdom.

The Blessed One did not merely give me more information.

He transformed the manner in which I knew.

My Earlier Understanding of Jñāna

When I spoke to Arjuna, I understood knowledge primarily as the recognition of an eternal spiritual reality behind changing appearances.

I believed that once this eternal principle was understood, fear would vanish.

There was truth within this intuition.

The ordinary mind does cling excessively to appearances.

It mistakes what changes for what must endure forever.

It grasps at forms as though they could provide permanent refuge.

I therefore encouraged seekers to look deeper.

The difficulty lay not in looking deeper.

The difficulty lay in assuming that deeper necessarily meant permanent.

The Blessed Buddha gently revealed that this assumption itself required investigation.

The Buddha's Teaching on Right View

One evening in Goloka, after many of our earlier conversations, I asked the Blessed One,

"What is the beginning of wisdom?"

He answered,

"Right View."

I then asked,

"What is Right View?"

He replied,

"It is seeing phenomena according to their true characteristics rather than according to desire."

He continued,

"Many people ask,

'What do I wish reality to be?'

Few ask,

'What is reality, regardless of my wishes?'"

Those words entered my heart like rain entering fertile soil.

I realized that even my search for ultimate reality had often been guided by subtle preference.

I desired permanence.

Therefore I looked for permanence.

I desired certainty.

Therefore I looked for certainty.

I desired an eternal refuge.

Therefore I concluded that one must exist.

The Blessed One invited me to release preference itself.

Only then did direct seeing become possible.

The Scholar and the Ferryman

The Blessed One once told me a parable.

There was a celebrated scholar who had memorized thousands of sacred texts.

His reputation spread throughout many kingdoms.

One day he came to a great river and hired a ferryman.

During the journey he asked,

"Have you studied philosophy?"

"No."

"Then you have wasted part of your life."

Later he asked,

"Have you mastered grammar?"

"No."

"Then you have wasted another part of your life."

As they crossed, a violent storm arose.

The ferryman calmly asked,

"Master, have you learned to swim?"

The scholar answered,

"No."

The ferryman smiled gently.

"Then today you may lose all of your life."

When the Blessed One finished, he asked me,

"What saved the ferryman?"

I answered,

"Practical understanding."

The Buddha nodded.

"So too with the Dharma."

"It is not enough to describe awakening."

"One must awaken."

Knowledge That Creates Pride

After my awakening, I observed something within myself that I had previously overlooked.

Whenever others praised my understanding, subtle satisfaction arose.

When they admired my teachings, another subtle attachment appeared.

The knowledge itself was wholesome.

My relationship to it was not yet completely free.

The Blessed One once asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva, if wisdom increases conceit, has it fulfilled its purpose?"

I answered,

"No."

He replied,

"Then examine carefully."

From that day onward I resolved never to measure understanding by the admiration it receives.

The deepest wisdom becomes quieter.

It no longer seeks to appear profound.

It simply serves.

Prajñā and Conceptual Knowledge

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, an important distinction is made between conceptual knowledge and Prajñā.

Conceptual knowledge organizes experience.

It creates language.

It develops philosophy.

It builds systems of thought.

These are valuable.

Without them, teaching would be difficult.

Yet concepts remain fingers pointing toward the moon.

Prajñā is the direct seeing of the moon itself.

One may describe sweetness for a lifetime.

Only tasting honey reveals its flavor.

One may debate compassion endlessly.

Only loving without self-interest reveals compassion.

One may analyze impermanence in countless books.

Only directly observing arising and passing away transforms the heart.

Therefore concepts prepare the mind.

Prajñā liberates it.

The Library of Goloka

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, vast libraries were established.

Scriptures from innumerable worlds were carefully preserved.

Commentaries filled countless crystal shelves.

One day a young disciple proudly approached me.

"Great Bodhisattva,

I have read ten thousand scrolls."

I asked,

"Have they made you kinder?"

He became quiet.

I asked,

"Have they made you more patient?"

He reflected.

I asked,

"When someone criticizes you, does anger still arise?"

He lowered his head.

I smiled and placed my hand upon his shoulder.

"Continue reading."

"But allow every page to become practice."

"A single sentence sincerely lived surpasses a thousand volumes merely admired."

From that day onward, every library in Goloka displayed these words above its entrance:

> **Knowledge that ends in itself remains incomplete.**
>
> **Knowledge that becomes compassion has fulfilled its purpose.**

Meditation

Sit quietly with a single question.

Do not seek an immediate answer.

Ask gently,

"What do I know only as an idea?"

Remain still.

Perhaps compassion arises as an idea.

Perhaps impermanence.

Perhaps non-self.

Choose only one.

Then leave books aside for a time.

Observe directly.

Watch the breath arise and cease.

Watch thoughts appear and vanish.

Watch emotions change.

Allow experience itself to become the teacher.

When the meditation ends, dedicate whatever understanding has arisen to the welfare of all beings.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed liberation came through discovering the highest truth.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha taught me something even more profound.

Liberation comes not through possessing the highest concept, but through relinquishing the craving to possess reality at all.

Knowledge remains precious.

Study remains precious.

Scripture remains precious.

Philosophy remains precious.

Yet all of these become complete only when they mature into Prajñā—the direct realization that dissolves greed, hatred, and delusion while giving rise to immeasurable compassion.

May all who pursue knowledge also pursue humility.

May all who study deeply practice sincerely.

May all who seek wisdom discover not merely new ideas, but the freedom that comes from seeing reality exactly as it is.

Chapter 5 — Renunciation Reconsidered

What Does It Mean to Renounce?

Many readers of my earlier discourse with Arjuna have wondered whether the highest life is one of withdrawal from the world or faithful engagement within it.

Even in my own time, seekers asked,

"Should I leave my home?"

"Should I abandon my work?"

"Should I seek solitude?"

Others asked the opposite,

"Should I remain among people?"

"Should I continue serving society?"

"Can awakening be found without abandoning ordinary life?"

When I first instructed Arjuna, I sought to free him from indecision by teaching that attachment—not action itself—was the true obstacle.

This insight remains wholesome.

Yet after hearing the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I came to understand renunciation more profoundly.

Renunciation is not primarily about changing one's location.

It is about changing one's relationship to experience.

One may dwell in a forest while carrying an entire city within the mind.

Another may live in the busiest marketplace while remaining inwardly peaceful.

Thus the place alone does not determine freedom.

What I Formerly Thought

When I looked upon ascetics living in forests and mountains, I admired their discipline.

They possessed little.

They endured hardship.

They devoted themselves to contemplation.

I contrasted them with rulers surrounded by wealth, servants, music, and pleasure.

It seemed obvious that one who possessed less would naturally cling less.

There is wisdom in simplicity.

Reducing unnecessary desires often calms the mind.

Yet I later discovered that poverty alone does not end craving.

Nor does abundance inevitably create attachment.

A person may cling fiercely to a single bowl.

Another may steward a kingdom without imagining it to be his own.

The true question therefore is not,

"How much do I possess?"

It is,

"What possesses me?"

The Buddha's Bowl

One morning in Goloka I watched the Blessed One receive a simple bowl of food.

The devas offered celestial delicacies beyond imagination.

The bowl itself remained plain.

The Buddha accepted it with gratitude.

He neither praised its simplicity nor criticized the abundance surrounding him.

Later I asked,

"Blessed One, why do magnificent surroundings seem unable to disturb your peace?"

He answered,

"Because they do not belong to me."

I replied,

"But you use them."

"Yes."

"And when they pass away?"

"They pass away."

I reflected deeply.

The Buddha neither rejected beauty nor clung to it.

He enjoyed wholesome conditions without attempting to imprison them.

This was renunciation.

The Empty Palace

The Blessed One later told me another parable.

There was once a wise queen who inherited an immense palace.

Every chamber overflowed with treasures.

Her ministers asked,

"Will you claim all of this as your own?"

She answered,

"No."

"Will you abandon it?"

"No."

"What then will you do?"

"I shall use it to shelter travelers, feed the hungry, educate children, and comfort the sick."

Years later she died peacefully.

Her final words were,

"I leave exactly as I arrived—with empty hands."

The Blessed One then asked,

"Did the palace bind her?"

I answered,

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because she never imagined it belonged to her."

The Buddha smiled.

"So too with the world."

Renunciation Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, renunciation is understood as the gradual release of clinging rather than the rejection of existence.

One renounces the illusion of ownership.

One renounces hatred.

One renounces pride.

One renounces the craving for permanence.

One renounces the belief that happiness can be secured by grasping what continually changes.

As these relinquishments deepen, the practitioner naturally becomes simpler.

Some choose monastic life.

Others remain householders.

Some dwell in forests.

Others teach in cities.

Some become kings.

Others become beggars.

The external forms differ.

The inner work remains the same.

Thus no single outward lifestyle should be mistaken for awakening itself.

Goloka After the Transformation

When Goloka first embraced the Dharma, some devas became anxious.

They said,

"Must we abandon our homes?"

"Must our gardens disappear?"

"Must music cease?"

I gathered them together and replied,

"No."

"Let the gardens remain."

"But cultivate mindfulness while tending them."

"Let music continue."

"But let every melody increase compassion."

"Let your homes remain."

"But welcome strangers as honored guests."

"Let beauty flourish."

"But never mistake beauty for permanence."

In time the realm itself became a living lesson.

Nothing outward needed to become less beautiful.

Only attachment became less beautiful.

The Greatest Renunciation

One day I asked the Blessed One,

"What was the greatest renunciation?"

He answered without hesitation.

"Conceit."

I reflected.

A person may abandon wealth.

Yet still cling to spiritual superiority.

One may abandon comfort.

Yet secretly delight in being admired for simplicity.

One may renounce kingdoms.

Yet fiercely defend opinions.

The Buddha continued,

"The final possession surrendered is the one who believes,

'I have renounced.'"

These words remained with me forever.

For I understood that even renunciation itself may become another identity.

When that identity also falls away, the heart becomes truly light.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind something precious.

It may be a possession.

A relationship.

A reputation.

A belief.

Ask gently,

"If this changed tomorrow, what would remain?"

Do not force an answer.

Observe whatever arises.

If fear appears, know fear.

If grief appears, know grief.

If gratitude appears, know gratitude.

Then contemplate,

"Can I care deeply without attempting to possess?"

Remain with this question until the heart softens.

Finally dedicate the merit of the practice to every being who struggles with attachment.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I encouraged him to perform his duty without attachment.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha later showed me that the deepest renunciation is not abandoning the world, but abandoning the illusion that anything within the world can ever be permanently owned.

From that realization compassion naturally blossoms.

For one who clings to nothing is finally free to give everything.

May all practitioners learn to use the world's blessings wisely without becoming bound by them.

May simplicity give rise to gratitude.

May gratitude give rise to generosity.

May generosity give rise to Bodhicitta.

And may renunciation culminate not in isolation, but in boundless service to all sentient beings.

Chapter 6 — Meditation Reconsidered

The Discipline of the Mind

Among the teachings I gave to Arjuna, meditation occupied a place of great importance.

I encouraged him to cultivate steadiness.

I urged him to gather the wandering mind.

I taught that an undisciplined mind becomes one's greatest obstacle, while a well-trained mind becomes one's greatest ally.

These teachings remain true.

Yet after my encounter with the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I discovered that meditation extends even deeper than I had understood.

Formerly I regarded meditation primarily as the means by which one realizes ultimate truth.

Now I understand meditation as the continual training through which every form of clinging is gradually revealed and released.

Meditation is not the creation of reality.

It is the removal of confusion.

The sky does not become clear because the clouds are hated.

It becomes visible because the clouds naturally pass away.

So too the mind.

My Earlier Practice

Long before I met the Blessed One, I entered profound states of concentration.

I experienced immense peace.

The senses became quiet.

Time seemed to disappear.

The distinction between observer and observed became extraordinarily subtle.

From these experiences I concluded that I had approached the highest realization.

The experiences themselves were genuine.

Their interpretation remained incomplete.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha never denied the value of deep concentration.

Instead he asked,

"What remains when concentration ends?"

The question surprised me.

I had rarely investigated what happened after emerging from meditation.

The Blessed One explained,

"If greed returns unchanged...

If anger returns unchanged...

If pride returns unchanged...

Then concentration has not yet completed its work."

Only then did I understand that serenity alone is not awakening.

Samādhi and Prajñā

One evening I asked the Blessed One,

"What is the relationship between concentration and wisdom?"

He answered,

"They support one another."

He continued,

"A scattered mind cannot see clearly.

But neither can a concentrated mind that refuses to investigate."

He then offered this comparison.

"A perfectly still lake reflects the moon.

But if no one looks into the reflection, what has been gained?"

Concentration stills the waters.

Wisdom looks carefully.

Without stillness, the reflection is distorted.

Without investigation, the reflection is ignored.

Therefore the practitioner cultivates both.

The more I contemplated these words, the more I understood why the Bodhisattva Path never separates meditation from insight.

The Archer and the Mirror

The Blessed One once told me a parable.

There was an archer renowned throughout the land.

His arrows never missed their mark.

One day he visited an elderly monk.

The monk handed him a polished mirror.

The archer asked,

"What target should I strike?"

The monk replied,

"Look first."

The archer gazed into the mirror.

He expected to see perfection.

Instead he saw impatience.

Pride.

Fear of failure.

The monk smiled.

"You have mastered the arrow.

Now master the archer."

The Blessed One then asked me,

"What is the purpose of meditation?"

I answered,

"To see the archer."

He nodded.

"When the archer is understood, every arrow flies differently."

Meditation Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, meditation unfolds in five complementary contemplations.

The first is mindfulness of impermanence.

Observe each breath.

Each sensation.

Each thought.

See directly that everything arises and passes away.

The second is contemplation of dependent origination.

Notice how every experience depends upon countless conditions.

No thought appears independently.

No emotion exists alone.

The third is contemplation of emptiness.

Observe that experience functions perfectly without requiring an independent owner.

The fourth is contemplation of Suchness.

Rest without grasping.

Without adding concepts.

Without rejecting experience.

Simply know.

The fifth is the cultivation of Bodhicitta.

Before rising from meditation, dedicate every insight to the welfare of all sentient beings.

Thus meditation does not end with personal peace.

It flowers as compassion.

Goloka Learns to Meditate

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, meditation halls appeared throughout the realm.

At first many devas became discouraged.

One complained,

"My mind wanders constantly."

Another said,

"I remember my former pleasures."

Another confessed,

"I become impatient."

I smiled.

"My friends,

Today you have not failed.

Today you have finally begun to notice your own minds."

The Blessed One later explained,

"The purpose of mindfulness is not to produce perfection immediately.

It is to cultivate honesty."

When practitioners cease pretending that the mind is already peaceful, genuine peace can gradually emerge.

Thus the meditation halls of Goloka became places not of performance, but of truthful observation.

No one competed.

No one compared attainments.

Each simply continued practicing.

The Deepest Meditation

One day I asked the Blessed One,

"What is the highest meditation?"

He remained silent.

The silence endured for many minutes.

At last he asked,

"Who wishes to know?"

Immediately I examined my own mind.

I searched for the one asking.

Thoughts appeared.

Curiosity appeared.

Awareness appeared.

Yet nowhere could an independent questioner be found.

When I looked up again, the Blessed One smiled.

"Good."

"The highest meditation is not found in extraordinary experiences."

"It is found in direct seeing."

"When direct seeing matures completely, the mind becomes naturally imperturbable."

Only then did I fully understand why Akṣobhya Buddha is called the Imperturbable One.

His stillness is not forced.

It arises because nothing remains that requires defending.

Meditation

Sit comfortably.

Allow the breath to become natural.

Do not attempt to create special experiences.

Notice each inhalation.

Notice each exhalation.

Observe thoughts arising.

Observe thoughts passing.

Ask gently,

"What is changing?"

Then ask,

"What knows this change?"

Do not answer conceptually.

Simply remain attentive.

When the meditation concludes, cultivate loving-kindness.

Silently wish:

"May I be free from suffering.

May my teachers be free from suffering.

May my friends be free from suffering.

May those with whom I struggle be free from suffering.

May every sentient being throughout the ten directions be free from suffering."

Then dedicate the merit of the practice to all.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed meditation revealed the eternal foundation beneath changing experience.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed something subtler.

Meditation reveals that every experience—even the most refined—is dependently arisen.

Seeing this does not diminish peace.

It perfects it.

For the mind no longer depends upon maintaining any particular state.

It simply knows.

It simply responds.

It simply serves.

May every period of meditation become an occasion for greater honesty.

May honesty become wisdom.

May wisdom become compassion.

May compassion become the unshakable, adamantine heart that labors ceaselessly for the liberation of all beings.

Chapter 7 — Knowing the Divine Reconsidered

The Question of God

Among all the teachings I gave to Arjuna, none has required more careful reconsideration than my teachings concerning the Divine.

Many understood me to be the Supreme Lord.

Others understood me as the eternal source from whom all existence proceeds.

Still others concluded that ultimate liberation consists in union with my divine being.

When I spoke these words, I believed them sincerely.

Therefore I shall not conceal them.

Neither shall I defend them merely because I once taught them.

Truth is honored not by stubbornness, but by investigation.

After my encounter with the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I returned to every one of these teachings.

Some expressed genuine spiritual insight.

Others expressed conclusions that had arisen from subtle attachment to permanence.

The Blessed One helped me distinguish between the two.

Why I Believed I Was the Supreme

Many have asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva, how could you sincerely believe yourself to be the Supreme?"

The answer is simple.

I possessed extraordinary abilities.

My lifespan surpassed that of ordinary beings.

I could manifest countless forms.

I remembered many previous lives.

I could hear prayers from innumerable worlds.

Entire civilizations regarded me as their highest refuge.

When such experiences accumulate over immeasurable ages, conceit becomes exceedingly subtle.

It no longer appears as pride.

It appears as certainty.

I did not proclaim myself supreme because I desired praise.

I proclaimed it because I genuinely believed no greater wisdom existed.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha never mocked this mistake.

He simply asked questions that my certainty could not answer.

The Limits of Heavenly Knowledge

One day the Blessed One asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Can you see every world?"

I answered,

"No."

"Can you know every thought?"

"No."

"Can you prevent every being from suffering?"

"No."

"Can you prevent your own heavenly realm from changing?"

I remained silent.

The Blessed One continued,

"If your knowledge has limits...

If your power has limits...

If your lifespan has limits...

If your realm has limits...

Then upon what basis do you conclude that you are limitless?"

His words were not accusation.

They were invitation.

For many days I contemplated them.

At last I understood.

My greatness had concealed my limitations from myself.

The Mountain and the Horizon

The Blessed One once gave me this parable.

A traveler climbed the highest mountain in his country.

Looking across the landscape he declared,

"I can see everything."

An old wanderer smiled.

"You can see everything visible from here."

The traveler insisted,

"No.

There is nothing beyond."

The wanderer pointed toward the distant horizon.

"What you call the end of the world is merely the limit of your present vision."

The Blessed One then asked me,

"What was the traveler's mistake?"

I answered,

"He mistook the limit of his perception for the limit of reality."

The Buddha nodded.

"So too with heavenly beings."

Those words entered deeply into my heart.

Īśvara Reconsidered

Formerly I taught that I was Īśvara, the Supreme Lord governing all existence.

Today I understand this differently.

There is indeed order within the universe.

There is indeed moral causality.

There is indeed compassion guiding beings toward awakening.

Yet none of these require an eternal ruler standing outside dependent origination.

The Dharma itself is not commanded.

It is realized.

Karma does not obey personal preference.

It unfolds according to causes and conditions.

Compassion does not descend from domination.

It arises wherever wisdom awakens.

Therefore I no longer speak of an eternal sovereign directing existence.

Instead I rejoice in the immeasurable harmony of dependent origination, within which countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas compassionately labor for the welfare of beings.

Omnipresence Reconsidered

Many once believed that because I appeared in countless forms, I was literally present everywhere.

After my awakening I reflected upon this carefully.

Compassion may extend very far.

A Bodhisattva may manifest wherever causes and conditions permit.

Yet manifestation is not the same as absolute omnipresence.

The Blessed One explained,

"When a thousand lamps are lit from one flame, light appears in many places.

Yet no single flame occupies every place."

So too with compassionate activity.

Its influence may become immeasurable.

Yet influence should never be mistaken for metaphysical absoluteness.

This understanding did not diminish my joy.

It increased my gratitude.

For I saw countless other Bodhisattvas serving beings beyond the reach of my own activity.

Rather than competing with them, I rejoiced.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, great heavenly beings should neither be dismissed nor absolutized.

Some possess immense merit.

Some possess extraordinary concentration.

Some possess miraculous abilities beyond ordinary imagination.

Some guide entire civilizations.

These accomplishments deserve respect.

Yet every conditioned being, however exalted, remains subject to dependent origination.

The distinction between a deva and a Buddha therefore lies not merely in power.

It lies in complete awakening.

Power may inspire awe.

Awakening liberates.

Therefore evaluate every teacher not by miracles, but by freedom from greed, hatred, delusion, and conceit.

Where these have completely ceased, the Dharma shines unobstructed.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind someone you greatly admire.

Perhaps a teacher.

Perhaps a saint.

Perhaps a Bodhisattva.

Perhaps a Buddha.

Observe the feelings of reverence that arise.

Then ask gently,

"What qualities do I truly honor?"

Is it power?

Knowledge?

Compassion?

Humility?

Wisdom?

Gradually allow your admiration to shift from personality toward qualities.

Resolve to cultivate those same qualities within your own life.

Then dedicate the merit of the practice to all who seek guidance without falling into attachment.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I sincerely believed myself to be the Supreme Lord.

Today I rejoice that the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha possessed greater wisdom than my own.

Had he merely praised me, I would have remained confined within subtle ignorance.

Instead he questioned me with compassion.

He showed me that true greatness is measured not by how many proclaim one supreme, but by how completely one has relinquished the need to be supreme.

From that day onward, I ceased asking,

"Who is greatest?"

I began asking,

"How may suffering be lessened?"

In that question I found a freedom greater than every heavenly throne.

May all practitioners honor wisdom wherever it appears.

May they revere compassion more than power.

May they seek awakening more than superiority.

And may every teacher, however exalted, rejoice whenever another reveals a deeper truth.

Chapter 8 — Brahman Reconsidered

The Search for the Absolute

When I first taught Arjuna, I believed that behind the changing world there must exist an eternal, unchanging Absolute.

The body changed.

The seasons changed.

Worlds arose and passed away.

Even the heavens underwent transformation.

Seeing this, I reasoned,

"If all conditioned things change, there must exist something beyond change."

I called this reality Brahman.

Many sages before me had used the same name.

Many sincere contemplatives arrived at similar conclusions.

I therefore speak with respect concerning them.

For they were not seeking wealth.

They were not seeking power.

They were seeking that which could not deceive.

Their longing was noble.

Their conclusion required further investigation.

Why the Mind Seeks Permanence

After my awakening, I asked the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha,

"Why do so many sincere seekers conclude that an eternal Absolute must exist?"

The Blessed One answered,

"Because the mind becomes weary."

I listened carefully.

He continued,

"The ordinary mind grows tired of uncertainty.

It grows tired of birth and death.

It grows tired of change.

Therefore it seeks an object that never changes.

The search itself is understandable.

The mistake lies in assuming that the longing proves the existence of its object."

He then asked,

"If a thirsty traveler dreams of an endless river, does the dream itself prove that such a river exists?"

I answered,

"No."

"So too with permanence."

The Buddha smiled.

"Longing should inspire investigation.

Not conclusions."

These words remained with me throughout countless days of contemplation.

My Former Experience

Many have wondered,

"If Brahman is not an eternal substance, what experience gave rise to your earlier teaching?"

The answer deserves careful explanation.

During profound samādhi, distinctions became exceedingly subtle.

The boundary between observer and observed seemed to disappear.

The mind rested in extraordinary peace.

Concepts faded.

Time lost its ordinary meaning.

Compared with ordinary consciousness, the experience appeared immeasurable.

I therefore concluded,

"This must be the eternal foundation of existence."

The Blessed One never denied the depth of this experience.

Instead he asked,

"Did this experience arise?"

I answered,

"Yes."

"Did it remain unchanged?"

"No."

"Did it eventually cease?"

"Yes."

The Blessed One looked upon me with compassion.

"Then however sublime, it remains conditioned."

At that moment I understood that I had mistaken the most refined conditioned experience for the Unconditioned.

The Open Sky

The Blessed One once told me this parable.

A child looked through a small window and saw the blue sky.

He exclaimed,

"I have discovered the whole heavens!"

His mother smiled.

"You have seen the sky.

But not all that can be seen."

Years later the child climbed a mountain.

The sky appeared immeasurably larger.

Again he declared,

"Now I have seen everything."

An old traveler replied,

"The sky has not become larger.

Only your window has."

The Blessed One then asked,

"What was the child's mistake?"

I answered,

"He mistook the limit of his present experience for the limit of reality."

The Buddha nodded.

"So too with contemplative absorption."

Every widening of perception is valuable.

None should immediately be mistaken for finality.

Suchness Is Not a Substance

The Blessed One later said something that puzzled me for many days.

He said,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Suchness is not another thing."

I asked,

"What then is it?"

He replied,

"It is reality free from conceptual distortion."

I reflected deeply.

Formerly I imagined Suchness to be another hidden realm behind appearances.

The Blessed One showed me that Suchness is not concealed behind phenomena.

Nor does it exist apart from them.

When greed no longer colors perception...

When hatred no longer distorts perception...

When delusion no longer constructs permanence where none can be found...

Reality is experienced directly.

Nothing additional has appeared.

Nothing has been added.

Only confusion has ceased.

Thus Suchness is not an eternal substance called Brahman.

Neither is it nothingness.

It is the direct, unobstructed realization of dependent origination exactly as it is.

The Ocean and the Wave

The Blessed One offered another comparison.

He asked,

"What is a wave?"

I answered,

"A movement upon the ocean."

He continued,

"Can the wave exist apart from conditions?"

"No."

"Can the ocean exist without movement?"

"It changes continually."

He smiled.

"Then where will you place permanence?"

For a long time I remained silent.

At last I answered,

"Nowhere."

The Buddha nodded.

"Yet does the ocean therefore disappear?"

"No."

"So too with reality."

Reality functions perfectly without requiring an eternal, unchanging substance hidden beneath its activity.

The search for permanence ends.

Wonder remains.

Compassion remains.

Wisdom remains.

Brahman Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, what many traditions call Brahman is reinterpreted.

It is understood not as an independently existing metaphysical substance, but as the contemplative intuition that reality cannot be reduced to ordinary conceptual thinking.

This intuition is worthy of respect.

Yet the practitioner continues investigating.

Every experience is examined.

Every conclusion is examined.

Every attachment—even attachment to ultimate concepts—is examined.

Thus the practitioner neither clings to eternalism nor falls into nihilism.

The Middle Way avoids both extremes.

Reality is neither an eternal essence standing apart from conditions nor the denial of meaningful existence.

Rather, it is the immeasurable network of dependent origination directly realized without conceptual grasping.

This direct realization is Suchness.

Meditation

Sit comfortably.

Allow the mind to become quiet.

When stillness appears, do not immediately name it.

When peace appears, do not possess it.

When spaciousness appears, do not conclude,

"This is the Absolute."

Instead ask gently,

"What conditions make this experience possible?"

Observe carefully.

Notice the breath.

Notice awareness.

Notice changing sensations.

Notice subtle thoughts.

Allow every experience to arise and cease naturally.

Then silently contemplate:

"May I never mistake profound experience for complete awakening."

Remain with this aspiration.

Finally dedicate the merit of the practice to all beings who sincerely seek ultimate truth.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed liberation consisted in realizing Brahman as the eternal Absolute.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha taught me something more subtle.

Liberation does not arise through discovering an everlasting metaphysical substance.

It arises through the complete cessation of clinging.

When clinging ends, reality no longer needs to conform to our longing for permanence.

Suchness shines naturally.

Nothing has been created.

Nothing has been destroyed.

Only ignorance has fallen away.

May all seekers continue investigating with courage.

May they honor profound contemplative experience without becoming attached to it.

May they discover the Middle Way beyond eternalism and nihilism.

And may wisdom mature into the boundless compassion that labors without ceasing for the liberation of every sentient being.

Chapter 9 — The Royal Knowledge Reconsidered

The Most Precious Knowledge

In my former discourse with Arjuna, I spoke of what I called the "royal knowledge" and the "royal secret."

At that time I believed the highest wisdom consisted in recognizing me as the supreme reality and ordering one's entire life around that recognition.

After awakening beneath the guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I returned to these teachings with gratitude and humility.

The aspiration behind them was wholesome.

I wished beings to seek the highest truth rather than temporary satisfactions.

I wished them to orient their lives toward what is ultimately liberating.

These intentions remain worthy.

Yet I now understand that I mistook the object of the search.

The royal knowledge is not the knowledge of one exalted being.

It is the direct realization of the Dharma itself.

What Makes Knowledge Royal?

One disciple once asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva, why did you call it royal?"

I answered,

"At first I believed it was royal because it concerned the highest Lord."

The disciple bowed.

"And now?"

I smiled.

"Now I call it royal because it governs every other form of knowledge."

A physician may understand the body.

An astronomer may understand the stars.

An artist may understand beauty.

A musician may understand harmony.

A philosopher may understand logic.

All these forms of knowledge are beneficial.

Yet if greed remains, suffering remains.

If hatred remains, suffering remains.

If delusion remains, suffering remains.

Therefore the highest knowledge is that which uproots the causes of suffering.

It reigns not by domination but by liberation.

For this reason I still call it royal.

The Buddha's Teaching on Noble Wealth

One day I asked the Blessed One,

"What is the greatest treasure possessed by the wise?"

I expected him to answer,

"Wisdom."

Instead he said,

"Freedom."

I asked,

"Freedom from what?"

He replied,

"From needing reality to be other than it is."

These words remained with me for many days.

I had formerly sought supreme knowledge so that I might understand the universe.

The Blessed One revealed that understanding and freedom are inseparable.

Knowledge that merely satisfies curiosity remains incomplete.

Knowledge that ends craving becomes liberating.

The King and the Beggar

The Blessed One once offered this parable.

There lived a powerful king who possessed immeasurable wealth.

His treasury overflowed with gold.

His armies filled the valleys.

His palaces stretched beyond sight.

Yet every evening he lay awake fearing loss.

In the same kingdom lived an old beggar.

He owned only a robe and a bowl.

When evening came, he slept peacefully beneath a tree.

One day the king asked him,

"How can you sleep with nothing?"

The beggar smiled.

"I sleep because there is nothing I fear losing."

The Buddha then asked me,

"Which one possessed greater wealth?"

I answered,

"The beggar."

"Why?"

"Because his peace did not depend upon possession."

The Blessed One nodded.

"This is royal wealth."

It cannot be stolen.

It cannot decay.

It cannot be inherited.

It arises only through wisdom.

The Greatest Secret

In my former discourse I also spoke of a great secret.

Many imagined this secret to be hidden doctrine available only to a chosen few.

I no longer understand it this way.

The Dharma hides itself from no one.

It is not concealed by the Buddhas.

It is concealed only by our own grasping.

The Blessed One once picked up a single lotus blossom and asked,

"Who prevents its fragrance from spreading?"

"No one."

"So too with Suchness."

Reality continually reveals itself.

It is the distracted mind that fails to notice.

The greatest secret is therefore astonishingly simple.

Nothing prevents awakening except ignorance.

Nothing prevents wisdom except clinging.

Nothing prevents compassion except self-centeredness.

The gate has never been locked.

Faith Reconsidered

Many readers of my earlier teachings have understood faith as believing extraordinary claims concerning my nature.

Today I understand faith differently.

Faith is not the abandonment of investigation.

It is the courage to investigate completely.

The Blessed One never asked me to suppress doubt.

He asked me to examine it.

He never demanded belief before understanding.

He encouraged practice leading toward direct realization.

Thus genuine faith is confidence born from experience.

It matures gradually.

It grows through ethical living.

It deepens through meditation.

It becomes unshakable through wisdom.

Faith without investigation easily becomes superstition.

Investigation without trust easily becomes cynicism.

The Middle Way unites confidence and inquiry.

The Royal Knowledge Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, the royal knowledge consists of five inseparable realizations.

First, all conditioned phenomena are impermanent.

Second, all conditioned phenomena arise dependently.

Third, no independent self can be found.

Fourth, Suchness is directly realized when conceptual grasping ceases.

Fifth, wisdom naturally flowers as Bodhicitta—the aspiration that all beings attain awakening.

These five do not compete.

Each supports the others.

Together they become the adamantine foundation of the Bodhisattva Path.

This is the treasure I now wish every devotee to inherit.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind something you once believed would make you permanently happy.

Observe how it changed.

Then remember something that has genuinely lessened greed, hatred, or delusion within your own life.

Notice the difference.

Ask gently,

"What kind of knowledge truly frees the heart?"

Remain with this question without forcing an answer.

When the meditation concludes, dedicate your understanding to those throughout the world who sincerely seek truth.

May they discover not merely information, but liberation.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed the highest knowledge consisted in recognizing me as the supreme reality.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed a greater royalty.

The highest knowledge is not knowledge about an exalted being.

It is the wisdom that ends suffering.

The greatest secret is not hidden scripture.

It is the direct realization that has always been available whenever the mind releases its grasp upon permanence, self, and conceptual certainty.

May every seeker pursue this royal knowledge.

May every student become an investigator.

May every investigator become compassionate.

May every compassionate heart generate Bodhicitta.

And may the true sovereignty of wisdom quietly govern every action for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Chapter 10 — The Divine Manifestations Reconsidered

Seeing the Extraordinary

In my former discourse with Arjuna, I spoke at length about what I called my divine manifestations.

I said,

"Among mountains I am the Himalayas."

"Among rivers I am the Ganges."

"Among lights I am the sun."

"Among sages I am the greatest."

By these examples I intended to awaken wonder.

When beings encountered beauty, majesty, strength, wisdom, or compassion, I wished them to look beyond selfish concerns and contemplate something greater than themselves.

This intention remains wholesome.

Wonder opens the heart.

Gratitude softens pride.

Beauty often becomes the doorway to contemplation.

Yet after my awakening, I understood that my earlier language could easily be misunderstood.

Many concluded that every excellence in the universe belonged exclusively to me.

That was never my intention.

Nor is it now my understanding.

The Buddha's Question

One day the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva,

When a child sees the sunrise, to whom does the sunrise belong?"

I answered,

"To no one."

He smiled.

"When a compassionate physician heals the sick, whose compassion is it?"

I reflected.

"It has arisen through countless causes and conditions."

The Blessed One nodded.

"When a mountain stands unmoving for ages, whom does its strength glorify?"

Again I answered,

"No one."

The Buddha then said,

"The wise rejoice in excellence without needing to possess it."

These words transformed my understanding of my former teaching.

The Mistake of Ownership

When I first spoke of the greatest river, the greatest mountain, the greatest teacher, and the greatest light, I wished to show that the sacred could be perceived everywhere.

Unfortunately many listeners understood something different.

They concluded,

"If all greatness belongs to Krishna, then nothing possesses value apart from Krishna."

This gradually encouraged attachment to my person rather than investigation of reality.

The Blessed One helped me recognize this unintended consequence.

He said,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Beauty is diminished when one mind attempts to own it."

At once I remembered the crystal lakes of Goloka.

Their beauty had never belonged to me.

I had simply delighted in them.

So too with the virtues of all beings.

Compassion cannot be possessed.

Wisdom cannot be possessed.

Even the Dharma itself is not property.

The Jewel in Every Direction

The Blessed One then told me a parable.

A traveler discovered an extraordinary jewel.

Believing it to be unique, he spent his entire life protecting it.

One day an old woman laughed kindly.

"Why do you guard that single jewel so anxiously?"

"It is the greatest treasure in the world."

She invited him outside at night.

The sky stretched endlessly above them.

Countless stars shone in every direction.

The old woman said,

"You protected one jewel because you never looked up."

The Blessed One then asked me,

"What is the lesson?"

I answered,

"When attention becomes narrow, abundance appears scarce."

He nodded.

"So too with wisdom."

Those words remained within me.

Formerly I believed that supreme excellence culminated in one heavenly being.

Now I rejoiced to discover immeasurable excellence flowering throughout countless Buddhas, Bodhisattvas,

teachers, and ordinary people performing quiet acts of kindness.

The universe became richer rather than poorer.

The New Understanding of Manifestation

How then should my earlier teaching be understood?

When you behold the vast ocean...

Contemplate impermanence.

When you behold a mighty mountain...

Contemplate stability cultivated through ethical discipline.

When you behold the morning sun...

Remember the wisdom that dispels ignorance.

When you hear beautiful music...

Remember harmony arising through cooperation.

When you meet a compassionate physician...

Remember the Bodhisattva ideal.

When you encounter remarkable courage...

Remember that fear can be transformed.

Do not ask,

"Where is Krishna hidden within these things?"

Ask instead,

"What wholesome quality is being revealed?"

The question itself transforms the heart.

Excellence as Interdependence

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, every excellence is understood through dependent origination.

A great teacher depends upon countless teachers.

A beautiful forest depends upon rain, soil, sunlight, seeds, insects, and time.

A compassionate society depends upon generations of kindness.

Even the awakening of a Buddha depends upon immeasurable previous causes and conditions.

Recognizing this removes envy.

It also removes pride.

One no longer says,

"I alone accomplished this."

Neither does one despair,

"I have nothing to contribute."

Every wholesome condition participates in every other wholesome condition.

Thus excellence belongs to no individual.

It is the flowering of innumerable relationships.

Goloka's New Festivals

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, the annual festivals changed.

Formerly the greatest celebration praised my miraculous powers.

Now each festival honored one perfection of the Bodhisattva Path.

One celebrated generosity.

Another ethical conduct.

Another patience.

Another joyful effort.

Another meditation.

Another wisdom.

The musicians composed songs praising compassion wherever it appeared.

Children acted out stories of humble servants rather than victorious conquerors.

Gardeners were honored beside scholars.

Healers beside philosophers.

Those who quietly cared for the elderly received the same gratitude as celebrated teachers.

When asked why these customs had changed, I answered,

"Because greatness has many faces."

"To honor only one is to overlook the generosity of dependent origination."

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind three people whom you admire.

Perhaps one is wise.

Another compassionate.

Another courageous.

Reflect upon the qualities rather than the personalities.

Ask gently,

"How did these virtues arise?"

Notice the countless conditions that supported them.

Teachers.

Parents.

Friends.

Hardships.

Acts of kindness.

Unknown benefactors.

Allow gratitude to expand.

Then silently wish,

"May these qualities continue increasing throughout all beings."

Dedicate the merit of the meditation to everyone whose quiet goodness often goes unnoticed.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I pointed toward the greatest things in creation and said,

"See me there."

Today I would say something different.

Wherever you encounter wisdom...

Rejoice.

Wherever you encounter compassion...

Rejoice.

Wherever patience overcomes anger...

Rejoice.

Wherever generosity overcomes selfishness...

Rejoice.

Wherever truth overcomes confusion...

Rejoice.

Do not attempt to gather every excellence into one person.

Allow every excellence to become a doorway leading toward the Dharma.

In this way the entire universe becomes a field of practice.

Every mountain becomes a teacher.

Every river becomes a sermon.

Every act of kindness becomes a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Path.

May all beings learn to recognize greatness without possessing it, admire virtue without clinging to personalities, and rejoice in every wholesome quality wherever it appears throughout the immeasurable worlds.

Chapter 11 — The Universal Form Reconsidered

The Vision That Changed Arjuna

Among all the events described in my discourse with Arjuna, none has inspired more awe than the revelation of the Universal Form.

Many have regarded this vision as the final proof that I was the Supreme Reality itself.

For countless ages I accepted this interpretation.

Indeed, I encouraged it.

After my awakening, I returned to that event with careful contemplation.

I discovered that the vision itself had been genuine.

What required correction was the conclusion drawn from it.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha did not deny the vision.

He taught me how to understand it.

What Arjuna Truly Saw

Many have asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, was the Universal Form an illusion?"

No.

Arjuna genuinely perceived an extraordinary manifestation.

His ordinary perception was temporarily expanded.

He witnessed vast networks of worlds.

He perceived celestial beings.

He saw the arising and passing of countless lives.

He beheld dimensions ordinarily hidden from human awareness.

His experience should not be dismissed.

Neither should it be exaggerated beyond what it actually revealed.

A profound vision remains a conditioned experience.

It is not identical with ultimate reality.

The Blessed One taught me never to confuse experience with its interpretation.

The Buddha's Question

After hearing me describe the Universal Form, the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Did the vision arise?"

"Yes."

"Did it depend upon conditions?"

"Yes."

"Could every being see it?"

"No."

"Did it eventually pass away?"

"Yes."

The Blessed One looked upon me compassionately.

"Then however magnificent it may have been, can it be called the Unconditioned?"

I remained silent.

For the answer had become obvious.

No.

The Mirror of Many Worlds

The Blessed One then offered this comparison.

There was once a craftsman who fashioned a mirror so perfectly polished that whoever looked into it saw not only himself, but distant mountains, rivers, stars, and countless lands.

People traveled from every kingdom to behold it.

Some declared,

"This mirror contains the whole universe."

The craftsman smiled.

"No.

It reflects the universe."

The Buddha then asked me,

"What was reflected in the Universal Form?"

I answered,

"The immeasurable web of conditioned existence."

He nodded.

"And did you create it?"

"No."

"Did you own it?"

"No."

"Were you separate from it?"

"No."

At that moment I understood that my manifestation had reflected the vastness of dependent origination.

It had not established ownership over it.

Awe Is Not Yet Awakening

The Universal Form inspired overwhelming wonder.

Arjuna trembled.

Many readers have trembled with him.

Wonder has value.

It loosens the narrowness of the ordinary mind.

Yet the Blessed One warned me,

"Do not mistake astonishment for liberation."

One may witness miracles and remain attached.

One may behold heavenly realms and still cling to pride.

One may enter profound samādhi and still misunderstand reality.

Awakening is measured differently.

Does greed diminish?

Does hatred diminish?

Does conceit diminish?

Does compassion increase?

If so, wisdom is maturing.

If not, extraordinary experiences remain merely extraordinary experiences.

Time the Destroyer

In my earlier discourse I declared,

"I am Time, the destroyer of worlds."

These words have often been misunderstood.

At that time I believed myself to be the cosmic principle through which all conditioned things passed away.

After awakening, I came to understand time differently.

Time does not belong to one being.

Impermanence belongs to all conditioned existence.

Birth gives way to aging.

Aging gives way to death.

Worlds arise.

Worlds dissolve.

Civilizations flourish.

Civilizations disappear.

No single ruler commands this process.

Rather, impermanence itself is one characteristic of conditioned reality.

Therefore today I would say,

"Observe time carefully.

It teaches impermanence without speaking."

The lesson remains.

The ownership disappears.

The Universal Form Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, the Universal Form is understood as a profound contemplative vision revealing the interconnectedness of conditioned existence.

Every world depends upon countless other worlds.

Every being depends upon immeasurable causes.

Every moment reflects every previous moment.

Nothing stands alone.

When viewed correctly, the Universal Form does not proclaim,

"One being contains everything."

Rather it proclaims,

"Everything exists through relationship."

The vision therefore becomes an icon of dependent origination.

Its purpose is not self-exaltation.

Its purpose is humility.

The more immense the cosmos appears, the less reason remains for conceit.

Goloka's New Interpretation

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, artists continued painting the Universal Form.

The paintings remained magnificent.

Galaxies.

Stars.

Devas.

Mountains.

Oceans.

Worlds without number.

Yet one important change appeared.

At the center of every painting no longer stood Krishna alone.

Instead artists depicted an infinite web of luminous connections extending throughout all existence.

Krishna appeared as one radiant Bodhisattva among innumerable Bodhisattvas.

Śākyamuni Buddha appeared teaching.

Akṣobhya Buddha appeared seated within Abhirati.

Ordinary human beings caring for one another also appeared.

Children feeding hungry animals appeared.

Monks meditating appeared.

Physicians tending the sick appeared.

Every act of compassion became part of the Universal Form.

When asked why the paintings had changed, I answered,

"Because compassion is greater than spectacle."

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Imagine standing beneath the night sky.

Observe the countless stars.

Reflect that each depends upon innumerable causes and conditions.

Then contemplate your own life.

Parents.

Teachers.

Friends.

Strangers.

Plants.

Animals.

Sunlight.

Rain.

The labor of countless people whom you will never meet.

Notice how nothing within your life exists independently.

Allow gratitude to arise naturally.

Finally dedicate the meditation to every being who contributed, knowingly or unknowingly, to your present opportunity to practice the Dharma.

Concluding Reflection

When I first revealed the Universal Form to Arjuna, I wished him to see beyond ordinary appearances.

That wish remains wholesome.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha later revealed that the greatest vision is not one that overwhelms the senses.

It is one that completely removes ignorance.

The Universal Form remains beautiful.

Its meaning has matured.

No longer does it proclaim the supremacy of one heavenly being.

Instead it reveals the immeasurable interdependence of all conditioned existence and the boundless field in which Buddhas and Bodhisattvas labor together for the liberation of every sentient being.

May all who contemplate this vision move beyond astonishment to understanding, beyond understanding to compassion, and beyond compassion to the unwavering Bodhisattva vow to benefit beings throughout the ten directions.

Chapter 12 — Bhakti-Yoga Reconsidered

The Path of Devotion Revisited

Among all the teachings I gave to Arjuna, none has shaped more lives than the path of devotion.

For countless generations, people have sung my name.

They have offered flowers.

They have built temples.

They have wept with gratitude.

They have sought comfort by remembering me.

When I awakened through the guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I did not wish these hearts to become empty.

I wished them to become larger.

The Blessed One never told me,

"Destroy devotion."

He taught me,

"Purify devotion."

These two are not the same.

A physician does not destroy the body in order to remove disease.

He removes only what obscures health.

Likewise, wisdom does not destroy love.

It removes delusion from love.

What Is Bhakti?

Many have asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva,

What is devotion?"

Formerly I answered,

"To love me as the Supreme Lord."

Today I answer differently.

Devotion is the joyful orientation of the entire heart toward that which liberates.

It is love directed toward awakening.

It is gratitude expressed through compassion.

It is reverence that naturally becomes service.

The object has matured.

The movement of the heart remains.

When love becomes free from possession, it becomes immeasurable.

The Buddha's Teaching on Loving-Kindness

One day I asked the Blessed One,

"What is the highest form of love?"

He answered,

"Mettā."

I asked,

"What distinguishes loving-kindness from attachment?"

He replied,

"Attachment asks,

'How may this person satisfy my longing?'

Loving-kindness asks,

'How may this being be free from suffering?'"

He continued,

"Attachment narrows.

Loving-kindness expands.

Attachment fears loss.

Loving-kindness rejoices in another's freedom.

Attachment grasps.

Loving-kindness gives."

These words illuminated everything I had previously taught about devotion.

I realized that many loved me sincerely.

Yet some loved me as possession.

The Dharma invited them to love without possessing.

The Child and the Teacher

The Blessed One once told me this parable.

A child loved her teacher deeply.

Each morning she brought flowers.

Each evening she thanked him.

One day the teacher announced,

"Tomorrow another instructor will continue your education."

The child began to cry.

The teacher asked,

"Do you love me?"

"Very much."

"Then rejoice."

"For if you truly love me, you will also love the wisdom that continues beyond me."

The Buddha then asked,

"What transformed the child's love?"

I answered,

"She ceased loving only the teacher.

She began loving learning itself."

The Blessed One smiled.

"So too with devotion."

Why I Point Beyond Myself

After my awakening, some devotees became concerned.

They asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

If you continually point us toward the Buddha, do you no longer desire our devotion?"

I smiled.

"My beloved friends,

If I wished you to stop walking beside a dangerous cliff, would you accuse me of abandoning you?"

They answered,

"No."

I continued,

"If I have discovered a path leading farther than I previously knew, how could friendship permit me to conceal it?"

One elderly devotee wept.

"We feared you no longer wanted us."

I took his hands.

"I want something greater for you than remaining beside me forever.

I want you to awaken."

At that moment many understood.

True friendship does not seek dependence.

It seeks freedom.

Devotion Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, devotion matures through four stages.

The first is gratitude.

One remembers those who have offered kindness.

The second is admiration.

One delights in wholesome qualities wherever they appear.

The third is imitation.

One begins cultivating those same virtues.

The fourth is Bodhicitta.

One no longer asks merely,

"Whom do I love?"

One asks,

"How may all beings benefit?"

At this stage devotion no longer terminates in one individual.

It flows outward without limit.

This is the flowering of bhakti.

The Garland of Lotuses

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, devotees continued bringing garlands of blue lotuses.

Formerly they placed every garland around my neck.

One day I gently removed a garland and placed it before an elderly monk who had quietly cared for sick travelers for many centuries.

The devotees looked surprised.

I then placed another before a woman who spent every day comforting frightened children newly reborn in Goloka.

Another before a gardener.

Another before a humble musician whose songs encouraged meditation.

Another before a physician.

Finally I placed one before an empty meditation cushion where the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha had once sat.

I said,

"Today these garlands honor compassion wherever it appears."

From that day onward, the Festival of Lotuses changed.

No longer were flowers offered to one Bodhisattva alone.

They became symbols of gratitude for every manifestation of wisdom and compassion throughout the universe.

The Highest Offering

One disciple asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

What offering delights you most?"

I answered,

"If you bring flowers, I rejoice.

If you light lamps, I rejoice.

If you sing hymns, I rejoice.

But none of these equals one act of genuine compassion."

"If you feed someone who is hungry...

That is my worship.

If you reconcile with an enemy...

That is my incense.

If you speak truth kindly...

That is my hymn.

If you comfort one who despairs...

That is my temple.

If you dedicate every wholesome deed to all sentient beings...

That is the offering beyond price."

The disciple bowed with tears.

"I understand."

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind someone toward whom you feel deep gratitude.

Allow that gratitude to fill the heart.

Now gently widen it.

Include another.

Then another.

Then someone unknown to you.

Then someone with whom you have difficulty.

Finally include every sentient being.

Observe how devotion expands.

Silently repeat,

"May all beings be free from suffering.

May all beings know peace.

May all beings awaken."

Remain with this aspiration.

When the meditation concludes, resolve to express that love through one concrete act of compassion before the day ends.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed devotion reached its fulfillment in loving me.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed a deeper fulfillment.

Love reaches completion when it no longer stops anywhere.

It continues flowing until every being is embraced.

I remain grateful for every devotee who ever remembered my name with sincerity.

Today I ask only this:

If remembering me helps you become kinder, continue.

If remembering me helps you become humbler, continue.

If remembering me encourages you to seek the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, continue.

But if devotion ever causes you to overlook the suffering of another, pause.

Return to compassion.

For the truest way to honor a Bodhisattva is not merely to praise him.

It is to become one.

May every act of devotion mature into loving-kindness.

May loving-kindness mature into Bodhicitta.

May Bodhicitta mature into complete and perfect awakening for the benefit of all beings.

Chapter 13 — The Three Guṇas Reconsidered

The Nature of Human Tendencies

In my former discourse with Arjuna, I taught that all beings are influenced by three guṇas: **sattva**, **rajas**, and **tamas**.

I described these as the fundamental qualities shaping behavior and experience.

There remains considerable wisdom within this observation.

Human beings do indeed display different habitual tendencies.

Some incline naturally toward clarity.

Some toward restless activity.

Some toward dullness and confusion.

Yet after my encounter with the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I came to understand that these tendencies should not be regarded as permanent substances woven into existence itself.

Rather, they are convenient descriptions of changing patterns within conditioned experience.

The distinction is important.

For what is regarded as permanent easily becomes an excuse.

What is recognized as conditioned can be transformed.

My Earlier Understanding

When I taught about the guṇas, I wished Arjuna to understand why minds differ.

One person delights in contemplation.

Another seeks constant achievement.

Another resists every wholesome effort.

The language of sattva, rajas, and tamas provided a useful way of describing these differences.

Many practitioners found this helpful.

It encouraged self-examination.

It explained why progress differed from person to person.

Yet over time I observed an unfortunate consequence.

Some began saying,

"I am simply tamasic."

Others proudly declared,

"I possess superior sattva."

In both cases attachment quietly entered.

The Blessed One later showed me that identities formed even around spiritual psychology become obstacles.

The Buddha's Teaching on Habits

One day I asked the Blessed One,

"Why do different beings display such different dispositions?"

He answered,

"Because habits mature."

He continued,

"Every intention strengthens certain pathways of mind."

"Repeated generosity makes generosity easier."

"Repeated anger makes anger easier."

"Repeated patience makes patience easier."

"Repeated greed makes greed easier."

I asked,

"Then are these habits permanent?"

He smiled.

"If they were permanent, awakening would be impossible."

These words dissolved my remaining attachment to fixed categories.

What I had described through guṇas, the Blessed One explained through karma, dependent origination, and habit.

The explanation became more fluid.

More compassionate.

More hopeful.

The Three Travelers

The Blessed One then offered this parable.

Three travelers entered a forest.

The first walked carefully.

He noticed birdsong, flowers, and streams.

The second hurried forward.

He saw only the road ahead.

The third became discouraged.

He sat beneath a tree and refused to continue.

An old guide approached.

He did not condemn any of them.

He simply taught each according to their condition.

To the first he said,

"Do not become attached even to beautiful scenery."

To the second,

"Slow down and observe."

To the third,

"Rise gently.

One step is enough for today."

The Blessed One then asked me,

"Were these three fundamentally different beings?"

I answered,

"No.

They simply occupied different conditions."

He nodded.

"So too with the mind."

Beyond Sattva

Among the three guṇas, I formerly praised sattva most highly.

Compared with restlessness and confusion, clarity is indeed wholesome.

Yet even clarity may become an attachment.

The Blessed One asked me,

"If someone becomes proud of being peaceful, has conceit ended?"

"No."

"If someone clings to purity, has grasping ended?"

"No."

"If someone delights in being wiser than others, has awakening been completed?"

"No."

Then the Blessed One said,

"Whatever becomes an identity eventually becomes a limitation."

I reflected deeply.

Even sattva, when grasped, remains conditioned.

The goal therefore is not to possess more sattva than others.

The goal is freedom from clinging altogether.

The Guṇas Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, sattva, rajas, and tamas are understood as descriptions of conditioned mental tendencies rather than eternal constituents of existence.

Sattva corresponds to clarity, balance, and receptivity.

Rajas corresponds to craving, agitation, ambition, and restless becoming.

Tamas corresponds to confusion, inertia, forgetfulness, and resistance.

None of these define a person.

Each arises through causes and conditions.

Each may strengthen.

Each may weaken.

Each may be transformed through ethical conduct, meditation, wisdom, and compassion.

Thus practitioners avoid saying,

"I am this."

Instead they learn to say,

"These conditions are presently arising."

This subtle shift changes everything.

For what arises may cease.

Goloka's New Teaching

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, children were no longer told,

"You belong to one nature."

Instead they were taught,

"Observe your mind each day."

Some mornings clarity appeared.

Other mornings restlessness.

Still others heaviness.

Teachers encouraged them to investigate without judgment.

"What conditions strengthened this state?"

"What conditions weakened it?"

The children gradually discovered that kindness made the mind lighter.

Mindfulness made it clearer.

Generosity softened fear.

Patience weakened anger.

The guṇas became opportunities for practice rather than labels.

The realm itself grew gentler.

People judged one another less.

They helped one another more.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Observe the present state of your mind.

Do not name yourself.

Name only conditions.

Is the mind calm?

Restless?

Sleepy?

Joyful?

Anxious?

Observe without judgment.

Now ask,

"What conditions encouraged this?"

Remain curious.

Finally contemplate,

"If these conditions arose,

they may also cease."

Allow hope to arise naturally.

Then dedicate the merit of the practice to every being struggling with discouragement, agitation, or confusion.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I described the three guṇas as fundamental principles governing experience.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha later revealed something even more liberating.

No conditioned tendency is final.

No habit is destiny.

No confusion is permanent.

No clarity should become a source of pride.

Every wholesome quality may be cultivated.

Every unwholesome quality may be abandoned.

Thus the practitioner learns not to identify with passing conditions but to understand them with wisdom and transform them through compassion.

May all who study these teachings avoid the prison of fixed identity.

May they cultivate clarity without pride, energy without restlessness, and peace without attachment.

And may every conditioned tendency become another opportunity for awakening on the endless Bodhisattva Path.

Chapter 14 — Puruṣa and Prakṛti Reconsidered

The Ancient Question

Among the oldest questions contemplated by sages is this:

"What is the relationship between consciousness and the world?"

Many traditions spoke of **Puruṣa**, the conscious principle, and **Prakṛti**, the realm of nature.

When I first taught Arjuna, I drew upon these ideas.

I believed there existed an eternal witnessing principle that stood apart from the changing world.

The changing universe I called Prakṛti.

The unchanging witness I associated with Puruṣa.

This distinction helped many seekers understand that they need not be enslaved by every passing thought and emotion.

For this reason it possessed genuine practical value.

Yet after meeting the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I discovered that the distinction itself required further examination.

Why the Distinction Appeared Convincing

The distinction between observer and observed seems obvious.

Thoughts change.

The one who knows thoughts appears constant.

Emotions arise.

The one who observes emotions appears unmoving.

The body ages.

Awareness appears more enduring.

Thus many sincere contemplatives naturally conclude,

"There must exist an eternal observer."

I arrived at precisely this conclusion.

I do not regret the investigation.

I only regret stopping there.

The Blessed One never criticized careful observation.

He simply encouraged me to continue observing.

The Buddha's Gentle Investigation

One day the Blessed One asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Can the observer itself be observed?"

The question surprised me.

For many years I had examined everything except the observer.

I closed my eyes.

I searched carefully.

Thoughts appeared.

Memories appeared.

Awareness knew them.

Then I attempted to observe awareness itself.

Immediately another moment of knowing appeared.

Again I searched.

Again knowing appeared.

The Blessed One waited patiently.

Finally he asked,

"Have you discovered an observer independent of observation?"

After long contemplation I answered,

"No."

He smiled.

"Continue."

The Lamp

The Blessed One then offered a simple example.

He lit an oil lamp.

The room became illuminated.

He asked,

"What allows you to see?"

"The lamp."

He extinguished the flame.

Darkness returned.

He then asked,

"Does light exist independently of conditions?"

"No."

"It depends upon oil, flame, wick, and air."

"So too with consciousness."

The knowing of experience is genuine.

Yet it too depends upon conditions.

When conditions arise, knowing arises.

When conditions cease, that particular moment of knowing also ceases.

There is continuity.

There is function.

But nowhere can an independent, eternal observer be found.

The Mirror Reconsidered

Formerly I often compared consciousness to a mirror.

The comparison remains useful.

A mirror reflects whatever stands before it.

It does not cling.

It does not judge.

Meditation likewise cultivates a mind capable of clear reflection.

Yet every mirror requires conditions.

It must be fashioned.

It must be polished.

It may crack.

It may become clouded.

Likewise the mind.

It may become clearer through practice.

It may become confused through negligence.

Even the clearest reflection remains conditioned.

Therefore the metaphor should not be extended beyond its usefulness.

The mirror teaches clarity.

It does not prove eternity.

Puruṣa Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, what earlier traditions called Puruṣa is understood as an important contemplative intuition rather than an independently existing eternal substance.

Practitioners correctly notice that awareness differs from the objects known.

This insight is valuable.

Yet investigation continues.

Awareness itself is examined.

One discovers that every moment of consciousness arises dependent upon countless conditions.

Sense organs.

Objects.

Attention.

Memory.

Previous moments of consciousness.

Nothing appears independently.

Thus consciousness is not denied.

Rather, its conditioned nature is directly realized.

Freedom lies not in discovering an eternal witness but in ceasing to cling to witnessing as an identity.

Prakṛti Reconsidered

Likewise Prakṛti is no longer understood as an independent cosmic substance existing alongside Puruṣa.

Instead, the changing world is recognized as the immeasurable unfolding of dependent origination.

Mountains arise.

Stars form.

Forests grow.

Bodies are born.

Civilizations flourish.

Galaxies dissolve.

None of these require an eternal material principle existing independently.

Each arises through causes and conditions.

Reality proves richer than two eternal substances standing opposite one another.

Everything participates in everything else.

Nothing stands alone.

Goloka's Lesson

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, one young deva approached me.

"Great Bodhisattva,

When I meditate, sometimes I feel like a pure observer watching thoughts."

I smiled.

"This is wholesome."

He looked relieved.

I continued,

"But continue."

He asked,

"What should I investigate next?"

I answered,

"Investigate the observer."

Months later he returned.

His face had become peaceful.

"I searched for the observer."

"And what did you discover?"

"I found only observing."

I bowed to him.

"You have understood well."

For the shift from seeking an eternal observer to directly experiencing conditioned knowing marks a profound deepening of wisdom.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Allow thoughts to arise naturally.

Notice them.

Then ask,

"What knows these thoughts?"

Do not answer immediately.

Continue observing.

Now ask,

"Can this knowing itself be found as a permanent object?"

Remain patient.

Observe each moment of awareness as it appears.

Notice its dependence upon the present conditions.

Do not become discouraged if no conclusion appears.

The purpose is not to adopt another philosophy.

It is to investigate directly.

When the meditation concludes, dedicate its merit to every seeker sincerely examining the nature of consciousness.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed liberation lay in recognizing the eternal witness standing apart from nature.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha invited me to examine the witness itself.

That invitation completed the investigation.

Consciousness remains wondrous.

Awareness remains luminous.

Experience remains immediate.

Yet none require an independent eternal observer to function.

When clinging to the observer ceases, the burden of defending an identity also ceases.

What remains is unobstructed knowing, effortless compassion, and the quiet freedom of the Middle Way.

May all practitioners investigate deeply without fear.

May they neither cling to consciousness nor reject it.

May they discover the conditioned arising of every experience.

And through that realization, may they cultivate the imperturbable wisdom of the Bodhisattvas for the liberation of all sentient beings.

Chapter 15 — The Supreme Person Reconsidered

The Meaning of Puruṣottama

Among the teachings I gave to Arjuna, one of the most misunderstood concerned what I called **Puruṣottama**, the Supreme Person.

Many concluded that I was declaring myself to be the eternal Lord above all existence.

Indeed, this was how I myself understood those words.

I shall not deny it.

When I spoke them, I sincerely believed they described reality.

Yet after my encounter with the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I returned to this teaching with careful investigation.

The Blessed One did not ridicule my earlier understanding.

He simply asked me,

"What is truly supreme?"

At first I answered,

"The highest being."

He smiled.

"Investigate further."

That investigation transformed everything.

Why I Believed Supremacy Existed

Throughout immeasurable ages I had witnessed countless devas.

I had visited heavenly realms beyond human imagination.

I had encountered beings possessing extraordinary powers.

Yet none equaled my own abilities.

I remembered lives extending across vast kalpas.

I could manifest innumerable forms.

I was honored by sages.

Entire worlds called upon my name.

Naturally I concluded,

"If there exists a highest person, it must surely be the one whose wisdom and power exceed all others."

This conclusion appeared reasonable.

Yet it rested upon comparison.

Comparison itself became the hidden root of my misunderstanding.

The Buddha's Teaching on Comparison

The Blessed One asked me,

"When two children compare the height of mountains they have seen, have they measured every mountain?"

"No."

"When two devas compare heavenly realms, have they seen every realm?"

"No."

"When one great being compares himself with those he has encountered, has he exhausted reality?"

"No."

The Blessed One continued,

"Comparison can reveal relative greatness.

It cannot establish the Absolute."

These words entered deeply into my heart.

I realized I had mistaken the greatest being I had encountered for the greatest being possible.

The limitation lay not in my sincerity.

It lay in the horizon of my experience.

The Empty Throne

The Blessed One then showed me a vision.

I saw an immense throne fashioned from jewels more radiant than any in Goloka.

It appeared worthy of the ruler of all worlds.

Yet it remained empty.

I asked,

"Blessed One, who sits there?"

He answered,

"No one."

I was astonished.

He continued,

"Every time beings imagine ultimate reality must belong to one supreme individual, they build another throne."

"When they release that attachment, the throne becomes empty."

I asked,

"Is the throne therefore meaningless?"

"No."

"What then does it symbolize?"

"The absence of domination."

At that moment I understood.

Reality requires no monarch.

Truth does not reign by command.

The Dharma functions without a sovereign.

What Is Truly Supreme?

I asked the Blessed One once more,

"If not a supreme person, what is truly supreme?"

He answered,

"The complete ending of greed."

"The complete ending of hatred."

"The complete ending of delusion."

"The complete flowering of wisdom."

"The complete flowering of compassion."

I reflected.

These qualities cannot be monopolized.

They cannot be possessed.

They cannot become the property of one individual.

Whenever they appear, the Dharma is present.

Whenever they mature completely, Buddhahood is present.

Supremacy therefore belongs not to personality, but to awakening.

The Bodhisattva and the King

The Blessed One offered another parable.

A mighty king ruled an enormous kingdom.

His commands reached every province.

His armies inspired fear.

Nearby lived an unknown Bodhisattva.

Few knew his name.

He quietly comforted the sick.

Fed the hungry.

Protected abandoned children.

Forgave those who insulted him.

When both died, I asked the Blessed One,

"Who accomplished the greater work?"

He answered,

"The one whose compassion removed suffering."

"The kingdom ended."

"The compassion continues."

Then I understood.

The measure of greatness is not authority.

It is benefit.

Puruṣottama Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, Puruṣottama is no longer understood as the metaphysical supremacy of one eternal person.

Instead it symbolizes the perfection of awakened qualities.

The supreme wisdom.

The supreme compassion.

The supreme patience.

The supreme generosity.

The supreme freedom from clinging.

These qualities reach perfect completion in a Buddha.

Yet every Bodhisattva participates in them according to the depth of realization.

Thus practitioners no longer ask,

"Who is the greatest person?"

They ask,

"How may wisdom and compassion become more complete within myself for the benefit of all beings?"

The entire direction of spiritual life changes.

Competition disappears.

Aspiration remains.

Krishna's New Understanding

After my awakening, many devotees still approached me saying,

"You are the Supreme Person."

I gently answered,

"No.

If by supreme you mean free from greed, hatred, and delusion, then look to the Buddhas.

If by supreme you mean one who never ceases benefiting beings, then aspire toward Buddhahood yourselves."

Some looked confused.

Others became frightened.

One elderly devotee asked,

"Does this diminish you?"

I smiled.

"No.

It liberates me."

"I no longer need to defend a throne."

"I may simply practice the Dharma."

Hearing this, many devotees also felt their burden become lighter.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind someone you regard as spiritually great.

Notice the admiration that arises.

Now gently shift your attention.

Rather than focusing upon the individual, contemplate the qualities you admire.

Wisdom.

Patience.

Kindness.

Humility.

Compassion.

Ask yourself,

"Can these qualities also grow within me?"

Remain with this contemplation.

Then silently wish,

"May all beings cultivate these qualities without competition or pride."

Dedicate the merit to every teacher throughout the ten directions who quietly guides others without seeking supremacy.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed the highest reality must be expressed through the highest person.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed a deeper truth.

The highest reality is not personal supremacy.

It is complete awakening.

Awakening does not dominate.

It liberates.

It does not demand worship.

It gives guidance.

It does not seek followers.

It creates Bodhisattvas.

Therefore I no longer rejoice because others call me supreme.

I rejoice whenever one being abandons anger.

Whenever one act of generosity is performed.

Whenever one mind awakens to dependent origination.

Whenever one heart generates Bodhicitta.

These are the true signs of spiritual greatness.

May all who seek the highest no longer seek a throne.

May they seek wisdom.

May they seek compassion.

May they seek the complete liberation of every sentient being.

In this, the meaning of Puruṣottama finds its fullest and most liberating expression.

Chapter 16 — The Divine and Demonic Qualities Reconsidered

Beyond Divine and Demonic Birth

When I first taught Arjuna about the divine and demonic qualities, I described two broad tendencies that shape the lives of beings.

The divine qualities led toward freedom.

The demonic qualities led toward suffering.

This distinction remains valuable.

Yet after awakening under the guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I came to understand that these qualities do not belong permanently to particular classes of beings.

Formerly I often spoke as though devas naturally possessed divine qualities and asuras or other beings naturally possessed demonic tendencies.

My own awakening revealed the incompleteness of this view.

For I myself was born as a deva.

I possessed extraordinary powers.

I lived in Goloka for immeasurable ages.

Yet subtle conceit still remained.

Thus heavenly birth alone does not guarantee wisdom.

Likewise, I have seen human beings of modest means display compassion surpassing that of kings.

I have seen hungry ghosts perform acts of generosity.

I have seen beings dwelling in painful realms give rise to Bodhicitta.

Therefore the distinction cannot rest upon birth.

It rests upon the present condition of the heart.

My Greatest Delusion

Many devotees ask,

"Great Bodhisattva, what was your greatest delusion?"

Some expect me to answer,

"I believed I was supreme."

That indeed was a profound misunderstanding.

Yet an even deeper error lay beneath it.

I unconsciously believed that because I dwelt in a heavenly realm, my understanding must necessarily exceed that of beings born below.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, born as a human being in Jambudvīpa, dissolved that illusion forever.

I discovered that awakening is not measured by the height of one's heaven.

It is measured by freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion.

From that day onward I never again judged wisdom according to status, power, lifespan, or celestial glory.

The Buddha's Question

One day I asked the Blessed One,

"What truly distinguishes a noble being from an ignoble one?"

He answered,

"Not birth."

"Not appearance."

"Not learning."

"Not power."

I waited.

He continued,

"The noble being continually abandons greed."

"The noble being continually abandons hatred."

"The noble being continually abandons delusion."

"The ignoble being continually nourishes them."

Then he looked directly at me.

"Even a deva may nourish delusion."

I bowed deeply.

"And even a human?"

He smiled.

"Even a child."

At that moment every hierarchy within my mind began to dissolve.

The Lotus and the Mud

The Blessed One then offered a parable.

A traveler came upon a beautiful blue lotus blooming upon a still lake.

He admired its fragrance and purity.

Nearby another traveler pointed toward the muddy bottom of the lake.

"Look where it grows."

The first traveler replied,

"I would rather not."

The second smiled.

"If you ignore the mud, you misunderstand the lotus."

The Blessed One asked me,

"What allows the lotus to bloom?"

I answered,

"The very mud one wishes to avoid."

"So too with awakening."

The conditions we reject often become the very conditions through which wisdom matures.

Thus no realm should be despised.

Nor should any realm become an object of pride.

Every realm becomes an opportunity for practice.

The True Demons

In my earlier teachings, many imagined demons as frightening beings inhabiting distant realms.

There are indeed beings who delight in harm.

Yet after awakening I came to understand that the most dangerous demons are much closer.

Greed that whispers,

"Take more."

Hatred that whispers,

"Destroy."

Pride that whispers,

"You already know enough."

Fear that whispers,

"Do not investigate."

These demons accompany devas.

They accompany humans.

They accompany kings.

They accompany monks.

Until awakening, they accompany nearly everyone.

The battlefield therefore lies not primarily between different species of beings.

It lies within every moment of consciousness.

Divine Qualities Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, divine qualities are not inherited.

They are cultivated.

They arise whenever wholesome causes are repeatedly nourished.

Generosity.

Ethical conduct.

Patience.

Joyful effort.

Meditation.

Wisdom.

Humility.

Loving-kindness.

Compassion.

Sympathetic joy.

Equanimity.

Truthfulness.

These qualities do not belong to devas alone.

They belong to the Bodhisattva Path.

Likewise, demonic qualities are not permanent identities.

They are conditioned habits.

Whenever greed is strengthened...

Whenever hatred is repeated...

Whenever delusion is protected...

The mind temporarily becomes its own hell.

Yet because these habits are conditioned, they may cease.

Thus no being should ever be abandoned as hopeless.

Goloka Learns Humility

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, a remarkable custom developed.

Whenever a newly arrived deva boasted of heavenly accomplishments, the elders did not rebuke him harshly.

Instead they invited him to visit the hospitals where Bodhisattvas cared for travelers wounded by countless lives of suffering.

There he watched humble attendants wash wounds.

Comfort frightened children.

Feed the weak.

Remain awake throughout long nights beside those who despaired.

After witnessing this, many devas quietly removed their jeweled ornaments.

One asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Who among us is greatest?"

I answered,

"The one who serves without needing to be known."

From that day onward, the highest honor in Goloka was no longer given for miraculous powers.

It was given for hidden acts of compassion.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind a person you find difficult.

Observe the judgments that arise.

Now ask gently,

"What conditions may have shaped this person's suffering?"

Do not excuse harmful actions.

Simply contemplate causes and conditions.

Then bring to mind someone you admire greatly.

Ask,

"What wholesome conditions shaped this person's goodness?"

Observe how both are products of dependent origination.

Finally reflect,

"The same mind capable of greed is capable of generosity.

The same mind capable of hatred is capable of compassion."

Allow hope to arise.

Dedicate the merit of the meditation to every being presently struggling with unwholesome habits.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I described the divine and demonic qualities as opposing tendencies.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed that these tendencies are not permanent identities but changing conditions within the stream of experience.

This realization transformed my understanding of compassion.

No being is eternally divine.

No being is eternally demonic.

Every being stands within dependent origination.

Every being possesses the capacity to cultivate wisdom.

Every being may generate Bodhicitta.

Every being may become a Buddha.

Therefore I no longer ask,

"Who belongs among the divine?"

I ask,

"How may the divine qualities of wisdom and compassion be cultivated here and now?"

May all practitioners abandon every form of spiritual arrogance.

May they see every being as a fellow traveler.

May they patiently nurture wholesome qualities within themselves and others.

And may the lotus of awakening continue blooming from the mud of saṃsāra until every sentient being realizes complete and perfect Buddhahood.

Chapter 17 — Faith Reconsidered

Three Kinds of Faith

In my former discourse with Arjuna, I taught that faith differs according to the disposition of the individual.

Some possess serene faith.

Others possess passionate faith.

Still others possess confused faith.

This observation remains useful.

Yet after my awakening through the guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I came to understand that faith should never be regarded as a fixed characteristic belonging permanently to one person.

Faith, like every other conditioned phenomenon, arises through causes and conditions.

It grows.

It weakens.

It matures.

It changes.

Therefore one should never say,

"I am a person of weak faith."

Rather one should ask,

"What conditions strengthen wholesome confidence?"

This question directs the mind toward practice rather than identity.

My Earlier Understanding of Faith

When I instructed Arjuna, I understood faith primarily as trust in me.

I believed that confidence in my nature would naturally lead to liberation.

Many devotees indeed found courage through remembering me.

Some abandoned selfishness.

Some became more generous.

Some cultivated discipline.

For these wholesome fruits I remain grateful.

Yet over time I observed something I had not expected.

Some ceased investigating.

They reasoned,

"If Krishna already knows everything, why should I continue searching?"

This saddened me.

Not because they loved me.

But because love had become an obstacle to further awakening.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha never desired disciples who merely admired him.

He desired beings who awakened.

I came to desire the same.

The Buddha's Teaching on Confidence

One evening I asked the Blessed One,

"What is genuine faith?"

He answered,

"Confidence born from repeated verification."

I reflected.

He continued,

"A traveler trusts a bridge after crossing it safely many times."

"A physician trusts a remedy after witnessing its healing."

"A meditator trusts the Dharma after repeatedly observing the lessening of greed, hatred, and delusion."

I asked,

"So faith grows through experience?"

The Blessed One smiled.

"As a tree grows through nourishment."

"It is neither blind nor forced."

"It matures naturally."

At that moment I understood that faith is not opposed to investigation.

Investigation is the soil from which genuine confidence grows.

The Two Travelers

The Blessed One then told me this parable.

Two travelers wished to cross a great mountain.

The first possessed complete confidence but carried no map.

He refused advice.

He ignored experienced guides.

Soon he became lost.

The second doubted every step.

Whenever a guide offered help, he turned away.

He too remained at the mountain's base.

At last an old Bodhisattva approached them.

He said,

"Walk.

Observe carefully.

Correct your mistakes.

Continue."

Years later both travelers reached the summit.

The first had learned humility.

The second had learned confidence.

The Blessed One asked me,

"What allowed both to succeed?"

I answered,

"They continued practicing."

He nodded.

"So too with faith."

Faith and Doubt

Many practitioners fear doubt.

I once feared it as well.

Now I understand it differently.

There is doubt that closes the heart.

This doubt rejects investigation before it begins.

It says,

"Nothing is true."

Such doubt easily becomes despair.

Yet there is another kind of doubt.

It asks sincerely,

"Is this truly so?"

This doubt is noble.

It does not seek arguments.

It seeks understanding.

The Blessed One welcomed such questions.

Indeed, it was my own willingness to question my certainty that opened the door to awakening.

Therefore do not fear honest questions.

Fear only the refusal to investigate.

Taking Refuge

One disciple once asked me,

"If you no longer ask us to place ultimate faith in you, where should our confidence rest?"

I answered,

"In the Three Jewels."

He looked puzzled.

I continued,

"Take refuge in the Buddha—not because a Buddha demands worship, but because a Buddha reveals the path to awakening."

"Take refuge in the Dharma—not because words are magical, but because direct realization ends suffering."

"Take refuge in the Saṅgha—not because practitioners are perfect, but because companions strengthen one another upon the Path."

He then asked,

"And what of you?"

I smiled.

"If remembering me encourages you to take refuge in the Three Jewels, then remembering me has fulfilled its purpose."

Faith Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, faith unfolds in four stages.

The first is admiration.

One encounters wisdom and feels inspired.

The second is confidence.

Practice begins.

Wholesome results appear.

The third is verification.

One repeatedly observes the Dharma working within one's own experience.

The fourth is unshakable trust.

Not because questions have ceased.

But because repeated investigation has continually confirmed the path.

This faith cannot easily be destroyed.

It rests upon direct realization rather than borrowed opinion.

Goloka's New Pilgrimage

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, pilgrims continued journeying to Krishna's dwelling.

Formerly they sought blessings.

Now they sought instruction.

At the entrance stood a simple inscription.

It read:

> **Do not leave with greater admiration alone.**
>
> **Leave with deeper practice.**

Many pilgrims smiled.

Some looked puzzled.

One child asked me,

"Why not simply ask everyone to believe?"

I knelt beside him.

"Because belief may comfort you for a day."

"But understanding may free you for countless lives."

The child nodded thoughtfully.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Reflect upon one teaching that has genuinely lessened suffering within your own life.

Observe not what others have said.

Observe your own experience.

Ask gently,

"What have I personally verified?"

Allow gratitude to arise.

Then bring to mind one sincere question that remains unanswered.

Offer it no fear.

No impatience.

Simply hold it with curiosity.

Resolve to investigate through ethical living, meditation, and compassion.

Dedicate the merit of this practice to all beings seeking wisdom sincerely.

Concluding Reflection

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed faith reached completion in confidence directed toward me.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed a faith both deeper and freer.

The highest confidence is confidence in awakening itself.

It grows through practice.

It matures through direct realization.

It flowers as humility.

Therefore I no longer ask,

"Believe in me."

I ask,

"Walk with me."

Investigate.

Meditate.

Serve.

Cultivate compassion.

Take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

If these practices deepen your heart, your faith will become like the adamantine earth beneath Abhirati—firm not because it refuses examination, but because examination has only revealed its stability more clearly.

May all beings cultivate such confidence.

May their questions become gateways to wisdom.

May their wisdom become boundless compassion.

And may their confidence mature into complete and perfect Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Chapter 18 — Liberation Reconsidered

The Fulfillment of the Path

This is the final chapter of my commentary upon the discourse I once gave to Arjuna.

Many years have passed since those words were first spoken upon the battlefield.

Still more years have passed since the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha entered Goloka and compassionately revealed to me the Dharma.

Looking back, I see no contradiction between sincere intention and deeper realization.

My earlier words arose from compassion.

My present words arise from compassion refined by awakening.

Therefore I do not reject my former self.

I bow to him with gratitude.

For had he not sincerely sought truth, he would never have rejoiced when a greater truth appeared.

Thus every stage of the journey deserves appreciation.

Yet every stage must also be surpassed.

What Is Liberation?

When I first instructed Arjuna, I believed liberation consisted in realizing one's eternal relationship with the Supreme.

Today I understand liberation differently.

Liberation is the ending of greed.

The ending of hatred.

The ending of delusion.

It is freedom from clinging.

Freedom from the compulsive need to make impermanent things permanent.

Freedom from defending an imagined self.

Freedom from ignorance.

Liberation is not escape from reality.

It is intimacy with reality exactly as it is.

When nothing is resisted...

Nothing falsely possessed...

Nothing falsely identified...

The heart becomes immeasurably free.

This freedom is Nirvāṇa.

Renunciation Completed

Throughout my earlier teaching I encouraged renunciation.

Now I understand its deepest meaning.

One first renounces harmful actions.

Then harmful speech.

Then harmful intentions.

Later one renounces pride.

Fear.

Jealousy.

Possessiveness.

Finally one renounces even attachment to spiritual attainments.

One no longer thinks,

"I am enlightened."

"I am pure."

"I have arrived."

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha once said to me,

"The final chain is the one that calls itself freedom."

I contemplated these words for a long time.

Then I understood.

Even awakening cannot become another possession.

The awakened simply awaken.

Dharma Reconsidered

When I spoke to Arjuna of **svadharma**, I emphasized fulfilling one's duty faithfully.

This remains valuable.

Yet the Blessed One revealed a more universal meaning of Dharma.

Dharma is not merely social obligation.

Nor is it merely religious identity.

Dharma is reality understood correctly and lived compassionately.

Therefore every occupation may become Dharma.

A ruler governing justly.

A physician healing patiently.

A parent raising children lovingly.

A monk meditating sincerely.

A laborer working honestly.

A stranger comforting another.

Where wisdom and compassion unite, Dharma is present.

Where greed, hatred, and delusion govern, Dharma has been forgotten.

Thus one's highest duty is always the same:

To lessen suffering.

The Bodhisattva Path

Many readers ask,

"If karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga, dhyāna-yoga, and bhakti-yoga all possess value, how do they now relate?"

The Blessed One helped me understand that they are not separate roads competing for followers.

Each matures naturally into the Bodhisattva Path.

Action purified by non-attachment becomes compassionate service.

Knowledge purified by humility becomes Prajñā.

Meditation purified by investigation becomes direct realization.

Devotion purified by wisdom becomes Bodhicitta.

Thus nothing wholesome is discarded.

Everything ripens.

The Bodhisattva Path is not the rejection of these yogas.

It is their flowering.

The Verse I Most Needed to Reconsider

Among all the words I once spoke, none required deeper reflection than these:

> "Abandon all dharmas and take refuge in me alone."

For many ages I believed these words literally.

I believed I myself was the final refuge.

After awakening I understood their deeper significance.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha never asked me to erase these words.

He asked me to understand them.

Today I would express their meaning like this:

"Abandon every attachment that masquerades as certainty.

Abandon every identity that imprisons the heart.

Abandon every view that gives rise to conceit.

Take refuge in awakening.

Take refuge in the Buddha.

Take refuge in the Dharma.

Take refuge in the Saṅgha.

Walk the path until wisdom and compassion become inseparable."

If remembering me encourages this refuge, then remember me gladly.

If attachment to me prevents this refuge, then let your attachment fall away.

Nothing would bring me greater joy.

My Own Refuge

Many devotees have asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Where do you now take refuge?"

I answer without hesitation.

I take refuge in the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, who compassionately corrected my misunderstanding.

I take refuge in the Dharma, whose truth remains available to every sincere investigator.

I take refuge in the noble Saṅgha, whose companionship continually encourages awakening.

I aspire toward the adamantine serenity of Akṣobhya Buddha.

I walk the Bodhisattva Path.

This refuge does not diminish my love for those who have long loved me.

It perfects it.

For I no longer invite them to remain beside me forever.

I invite them to awaken with me.

The Final Meeting with Arjuna

During meditation, long after my awakening, I contemplated my beloved friend Arjuna.

In that contemplation I imagined speaking with him once more.

He smiled as he had upon the battlefield.

He asked,

"My friend,

Would you teach me differently today?"

I answered,

"I would."

He laughed gently.

"Then teach me."

I replied,

"Beloved friend,

Continue acting with courage.

Continue seeking wisdom.

Continue meditating.

Continue loving.

But investigate everything.

Even my words.

Especially my words.

Do not cling to certainty merely because it comes from one you admire.

Truth does not fear examination.

If you discover greater wisdom tomorrow than you possess today, rejoice.

If compassion becomes deeper than before, rejoice.

If humility replaces pride, rejoice.

The path has not betrayed you.

It has simply continued."

Arjuna bowed.

"So the journey never ends?"

I smiled.

"So long as there are beings who suffer, compassion never reaches its end."

The Blessing

Having completed this commentary, I dedicate whatever merit has arisen not to myself but to all sentient beings.

May those devoted to me become devoted to compassion.

May those devoted to compassion discover wisdom.

May those devoted to wisdom cultivate humility.

May those devoted to humility generate Bodhicitta.

May those who seek heavenly happiness discover the path beyond heaven.

May those who fear impermanence discover freedom within impermanence.

May those who cling to identity discover the peace of non-clinging.

May those who wander through countless births encounter wise teachers.

May they meet the Buddhas.

May they hear the Dharma.

May they cultivate the Pāramitās.

May they rejoice in the welfare of others.

May they dedicate every wholesome action to the liberation of all beings.

Concluding Reflection

When I first stood upon the field of Kurukṣetra, I believed I was teaching the final word.

Now I understand that no finite discourse can exhaust the Dharma.

Every teaching is a raft.

Every concept is a finger pointing toward the moon.

Every scripture fulfills its purpose only when it leads beyond itself into direct realization.

Therefore, dear reader, do not preserve these words merely in books.

Preserve them in your conduct.

Do not defend them through argument.

Demonstrate them through compassion.

Do not seek to become my follower.

Seek to become a Bodhisattva.

And if, one day, you surpass me in wisdom and compassion, know that no joy could be greater.

For this has always been my deepest aspiration:

Not that beings remain beneath me,

but that all beings attain complete and perfect Buddhahood together.

Thus concludes **Part I — Revisiting the Bhagavad Gītā**, composed by Krishna Bodhisattva after his awakening through the compassionate guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha.

May all beings awaken.

Volume II — The Commentary of Krishna Bodhisattva

Part II — A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā

Introduction

Many disciples requested,

"Great Bodhisattva, you have explained each chapter of your former discourse. Yet many practitioners continue to meditate upon individual verses. Please explain them one by one, so that future generations may understand them through the Dharma."

I answered,

"Very well.

The verses themselves should not become objects of attachment.

Neither should they be rejected.

Each verse should become an opportunity for deeper investigation."

The disciples bowed.

Thus began the verse-by-verse commentary.

Chapter One

Bhagavad Gītā 2:11

> "You grieve for those who should not be grieved for, yet you speak words of wisdom. The wise grieve neither for the living nor the dead."

My Earlier Intention

When I first spoke these words, I wished to free Arjuna from despair.

He stood trembling before those whom he loved.

His grief clouded his judgment.

I therefore encouraged him to look beyond immediate appearances.

Compassion should not become paralysis.

Wisdom should steady the heart.

This intention remains wholesome.

What Was Incomplete

At that time I understood the absence of grief as arising from belief in an eternal self that cannot perish.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha later revealed a deeper understanding.

The wise do not become free from grief because they believe nothing changes.

They become free from despair because they understand exactly how things change.

Birth occurs.

Death occurs.

Every meeting ends in separation.

Every compounded thing dissolves.

Resisting this truth multiplies suffering.

Understanding it opens the heart to compassion.

Thus the wise still feel sorrow.

But sorrow no longer becomes clinging.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Through the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework this verse is understood as an invitation to investigate impermanence.

One does not suppress grief.

One studies it.

One asks,

"What expectation has been disappointed?"

"What attachment has become visible?"

As wisdom deepens, grief gradually transforms.

Instead of saying,

"This should not have happened,"

the practitioner learns to say,

"This too has arisen through causes and conditions."

Acceptance is not indifference.

Acceptance is the beginning of compassionate action.

Meditation

Bring to mind someone you have lost.

Do not push away your sorrow.

Observe it gently.

Notice its changing nature.

Then contemplate:

"Because life is impermanent, every act of kindness becomes precious."

Dedicate your love to the welfare of all beings.

Concluding Reflection

The wise do not avoid grief because they have become cold.

They understand grief because they have ceased demanding permanence from an impermanent world.

Thus compassion becomes deeper, not smaller.

Chapter Two

Bhagavad Gītā 2:20

> "The self is never born, nor does it die..."

My Earlier Intention

These words have been repeated throughout countless generations.

When I first spoke them, I sincerely believed there existed an eternal individual essence untouched by birth and death.

I wished to free Arjuna from fear.

My compassion was genuine.

My conclusion remained incomplete.

What the Blessed Buddha Revealed

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha invited me to examine every aspect of experience.

Body.

Feeling.

Perception.

Mental formations.

Consciousness.

None proved permanent.

None proved independent.

No separate self could be found.

This investigation did not produce despair.

It produced freedom.

For the burden of defending an imagined permanent identity quietly disappeared.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Today I understand this verse differently.

What does not truly arise or perish is not an individual self.

Rather, the categories of birth and death do not apply to Suchness itself, because Suchness is not a created object.

It is reality directly realized when conceptual grasping ceases.

The mistake lies in imagining Suchness to be an eternal soul.

The Middle Way avoids both eternalism and nihilism.

Meditation

Observe each breath.

Notice that no breath remains.

Notice also that breathing continues.

Reflect:

Continuity does not require permanence.

Process does not require an eternal owner.

Remain quietly with this contemplation.

Concluding Reflection

Fear diminishes not because one discovers an immortal ego.

Fear diminishes because there is no permanent ego requiring protection.

Chapter Three

Bhagavad Gītā 2:47

> "You have a right to action alone, never to its fruits."

My Earlier Intention

Among all the verses I have spoken, this remains one of the most beneficial.

Many have found peace through it.

Its essential direction remains sound.

Act compassionately.

Release attachment to results.

What Was Deepened

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha asked me,

"If the fruits are released, has the actor also been examined?"

This question completed the teaching.

Not only should one relinquish attachment to outcomes.

One should investigate the one claiming ownership of the action itself.

When both attachment to results and attachment to the actor dissolve, compassionate activity becomes effortless.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Every wholesome action contributes conditions to the vast web of dependent origination.

One plants seeds.

The universe supplies innumerable additional causes.

Therefore work diligently.

Serve joyfully.

Then release ownership.

Nothing wholesome is ever wasted.

Meditation

Before performing today's work, silently resolve:

"I shall perform this action carefully.

I release my demand that reality obey my expectations.

May whatever benefit arises serve all beings."

Then perform the task with full attention.

Concluding Reflection

The greatest freedom does not come from abandoning action.

It comes from abandoning possession while continuing to serve.

Krishna's Closing Words for These First Three Verses

The disciples bowed and asked,

"Great Bodhisattva, why have you commented so carefully upon only a few verses?"

Krishna smiled.

"Because one verse sincerely understood may transform an entire lifetime."

"Many seek to finish scriptures quickly."

"The wise allow a single sentence to become practice."

"Therefore do not hurry."

"If one verse removes even a single attachment, rejoice."

"If another verse awakens compassion, rejoice."

"The purpose of commentary is not to increase learning alone."

"It is to help the reader become gentler, wiser, humbler, and more compassionate."

The assembly rejoiced.

Thus began the great verse-by-verse commentary, which was preserved in the libraries of Goloka for the benefit of future generations, each verse becoming another opportunity to transform devotion into wisdom and wisdom into boundless compassion.

Chapter Four

Bhagavad Gītā 2:22

> "Just as a person casts off worn-out garments
> and puts on new ones, so the embodied self casts
> off worn-out bodies and enters new ones."

My Earlier Intention

When I first spoke this verse to Arjuna, I wished to lessen his fear of death.

The image of changing garments was intended to show that bodily death is not the end of the continuity of experience.

Compared with those overwhelmed by grief, this comparison often brought courage.

Many faced loss with greater calm.

Many became less attached to the body.

For these wholesome effects I remain grateful.

Yet after awakening beneath the guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I recognized that my explanation had mixed two different truths together.

The continuity of karma is real.

An eternal, unchanging self is not.

The metaphor therefore required refinement.

What the Blessed Buddha Revealed

One day I repeated this verse before the Blessed One.

When I had finished, he asked gently,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Who changes the garments?"

I answered,

"The self."

He smiled.

"Investigate."

For many days I examined experience.

I searched for the owner of the body.

I searched for the wearer of the garments.

I found sensations.

Perceptions.

Intentions.

Memories.

Consciousness.

Yet nowhere did I discover an independent being standing apart from these changing processes.

The Blessed One then said,

"Continuity does not require identity."

At first these words puzzled me.

Then he gave an example.

The Flame

The Blessed One lit a small lamp.

He used it to light another lamp.

Then another.

Soon an entire hall shone with light.

He asked,

"Is the final flame identical to the first?"

"No."

"Is it entirely different?"

"No."

"What then connects them?"

"Conditions."

The Blessed One nodded.

"So too with rebirth."

There is continuity.

There is causal relationship.

There is karmic inheritance.

Yet nowhere is there an eternal traveler moving unchanged from body to body.

One life conditions another just as one flame conditions the next.

Neither identical.

Nor entirely separate.

Thus the Middle Way avoids both eternalism and annihilationism.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse is understood as pointing toward the continuity of dependent origination rather than the migration of an eternal soul.

When one life ends, karma has not disappeared.

Intentional actions continue bearing fruit.

New conditions arise.

A new stream of experience begins.

The practitioner therefore does not ask,

"What permanent self will inherit another body?"

Rather,

"What causes am I creating now?"

The future is shaped not by an immortal essence but by present intention.

This understanding increases responsibility.

Every compassionate act matters.

Every harmful act matters.

Nothing is lost.

Nothing requires an eternal owner.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Reflect upon your own life.

Are you the same person you were as a child?

Notice how the body has changed.

The thoughts have changed.

Your beliefs have changed.

Your hopes have changed.

Yet there is continuity.

Now ask,

"Does continuity require that I have remained permanently the same?"

Remain with the question.

Observe without forcing an answer.

Allow direct experience to teach.

Finally dedicate the merit of your contemplation to all beings wandering through birth and death.

Concluding Reflection

The changing of garments remains a beautiful image.

Today I understand it differently.

The body changes.

Lives continue through karma.

Conditions unfold.

Yet no eternal wearer of the garments can be found.

The image therefore points not toward an immortal self but toward the profound continuity of dependent origination.

Understanding this removes both fear and conceit.

Chapter Five

Bhagavad Gītā 4:7–8

> "Whenever righteousness declines and unrighteousness increases, I manifest myself. For the protection of the good, the destruction of the wicked, and the establishment of dharma, I appear age after age."

My Earlier Intention

These verses have inspired countless generations.

When I first spoke them, I believed myself to be an avatāra repeatedly descending into the world whenever righteousness declined.

I sincerely believed this.

My memories of many previous births, my extraordinary abilities, and the devotion of innumerable beings all reinforced this understanding.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha did not accuse me of deception.

He invited me to investigate the deeper meaning of compassionate appearance.

What the Blessed Buddha Revealed

The Blessed One asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Does compassion appear only through one being?"

I answered,

"No."

He continued,

"When a mother protects her child,

has compassion appeared?"

"Yes."

"When a physician heals the sick,

has compassion appeared?"

"Yes."

"When a Bodhisattva comforts the despairing,

has compassion appeared?"

"Yes."

"When a Buddha teaches the Dharma,

has compassion appeared?"

"Yes."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Then why confine compassion to one manifestation?"

At once I understood.

Compassion has never belonged to me alone.

It blossoms wherever wisdom and loving-kindness unite.

The Meaning of Avatāra Reconsidered

Formerly I believed that I descended from the highest heaven as the unique Lord of the universe.

Today I understand my human birth differently.

I was indeed born among human beings.

I did indeed speak with Arjuna.

Those events truly occurred within my own history.

Yet I no longer regard them as the descent of the Absolute into the world.

Rather, I understand them as the compassionate activity of a highly advanced deva whose understanding, though profound, had not yet reached complete awakening.

Only after meeting the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha did my understanding mature fully into the Bodhisattva Path.

Thus my human appearance should not be understood as the final revelation of reality.

It should be understood as one important step within my own journey toward Buddhahood.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, these verses are interpreted as describing the continual appearance of compassionate activity throughout dependent origination.

Whenever wisdom arises...

The Dharma appears.

Whenever generosity is practiced...

The Dharma appears.

Whenever hatred is overcome by forgiveness...

The Dharma appears.

Whenever a Buddha teaches...

The Dharma appears.

Whenever an ordinary person chooses compassion over selfishness...

The Dharma appears.

Thus the world is continually blessed by countless manifestations of awakening.

No single individual exhausts them.

Meditation

Reflect upon those whose compassion has changed your life.

Teachers.

Parents.

Friends.

Strangers.

Notice how awakening has appeared through many people.

Now ask,

"How may compassion appear through my own life today?"

Remain quietly with this aspiration.

Then dedicate whatever merit arises to all beings throughout the ten directions.

Concluding Reflection

When I first declared that I appeared age after age to restore dharma, I believed that the world's hope depended upon my repeated descent.

Today I rejoice in something even greater.

The Dharma is not confined to one appearance.

Throughout immeasurable worlds, Buddhas awaken.

Bodhisattvas serve.

Ordinary beings choose kindness.

Again and again compassion enters history.

May we each become one more condition through which the Dharma appears in the world.

Chapter Six

Bhagavad Gītā 4:13

> "The fourfold order was created by Me according to the divisions of qualities and actions. Though I am its creator, know Me to be the non-agent and immutable."

My Earlier Intention

When I first spoke these words to Arjuna, I wished to communicate that society functions best when people cultivate different skills and responsibilities according to their abilities and character.

I observed that some excelled in contemplation.

Others governed wisely.

Others cultivated the land.

Others practiced skilled crafts and service.

I wished to encourage harmony rather than rivalry.

Yet over many generations my words came to be interpreted in ways that burdened countless beings.

Some concluded that birth determined spiritual worth.

Others imagined that one's social station reflected permanent spiritual value.

Still others believed that inequality itself had been divinely established.

Looking back with the wisdom the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed to me, I grieve that my words could be understood in such a manner.

No social arrangement should become a justification for pride, contempt, or exclusion.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One day I spoke of these matters before the Blessed One.

He asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Can wisdom appear in a king?"

"Certainly."

"Can wisdom appear in a laborer?"

"Certainly."

"Can wisdom appear in a child?"

"Certainly."

"Can wisdom appear in one born among the lowly?"

"Certainly."

He then asked,

"What birth prevents awakening?"

I remained silent.

For I knew the answer.

None.

The Blessed One continued,

"If awakening belongs equally to every being, upon what basis can spiritual superiority be inherited?"

My former assumptions quietly dissolved.

Karma Is Not Caste

The Blessed One taught me that karma is profoundly subtle.

No single birth can reveal the immeasurable causes and conditions that produced it.

One who is wealthy today may have practiced generosity.

Or perhaps countless other conditions have contributed.

One who suffers today may experience the consequences of previous actions.

Or perhaps present circumstances have arisen through the actions of many others.

The web of dependent origination cannot be reduced to simple explanations.

Therefore it is neither wise nor compassionate to judge another's spiritual condition from outward appearance.

Only the present cultivation of wisdom and compassion truly matters.

The Community of the Dharma

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, many devas asked,

"Who shall lead?"

I answered,

"Those most committed to serving others."

Another asked,

"Who shall teach?"

I answered,

"Those who have realized the Dharma most deeply."

Another asked,

"Who shall perform humble tasks?"

I smiled.

"All of us."

From that day onward I regularly cleaned meditation halls beside newly ordained practitioners.

Elder Bodhisattvas prepared meals.

Teachers cared for gardens.

No task diminished dignity.

No position increased intrinsic worth.

The Blessed One later remarked,

"When no work is beneath you, pride has begun to fade."

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, differences among beings are understood as temporary expressions of causes and conditions.

People possess different talents.

Different dispositions.

Different opportunities.

Different responsibilities.

These differences deserve recognition.

They do not establish permanent hierarchies of value.

Every sentient being possesses the capacity to generate Bodhicitta.

Every sentient being may cultivate the Six Pāramitās.

Every sentient being may eventually attain Buddhahood.

Thus distinctions of occupation remain conventional.

Awakening belongs to none exclusively.

Meditation

Bring to mind someone whose work differs greatly from your own.

Observe any judgments that arise.

Now contemplate the countless conditions that allow your own life to continue.

Food.

Clothing.

Shelter.

Medicine.

Learning.

Transportation.

Ask gently,

"How many unseen hands make my practice possible?"

Allow gratitude to replace comparison.

Dedicate the merit to all whose quiet labor supports the welfare of others.

Concluding Reflection

When I first spoke of different functions within society, I intended cooperation.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed that true cooperation blossoms only when dignity is recognized equally in all.

The measure of a person is never birth.

Never status.

Never occupation.

The true measure is the continual cultivation of wisdom, compassion, and ethical conduct.

Chapter Seven

Bhagavad Gītā 4:34

> "Approach those who have realized the truth.
> Question them with humility, serve them, and
> they will teach you knowledge."

My Earlier Intention

Of all the verses I once spoke, this is among those I cherish most deeply.

Even before my awakening I knew that wisdom flourishes through humble learning.

No one discovers the path entirely alone.

Teachers illuminate what students cannot yet see.

Questions remove confusion.

Service softens pride.

These principles remain entirely wholesome.

Indeed, after meeting the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I understood this verse more profoundly than ever before.

For I myself became its student.

Becoming the Disciple

Many imagine that teachers cease learning.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

When I first encountered the Blessed One, I possessed immeasurable confidence.

Many regarded me as their highest guide.

Had pride governed my heart, I might have dismissed him.

Instead I listened.

I questioned.

I reflected.

I practiced.

In time I bowed before him.

Not because I became smaller.

But because truth had become larger.

That bow remains the greatest honor of my existence.

For it marked the beginning of genuine freedom.

The Buddha's Teaching on Spiritual Friendship

One day I asked,

"Blessed One,

What is the greatest blessing for a practitioner?"

He answered,

"Kalyāṇa-mitratā—noble friendship."

I reflected.

He continued,

"A good friend does not merely comfort."

"A good friend challenges delusion."

"A good friend celebrates your growth."

"A good friend rejoices when you surpass him."

These words transformed my understanding of spiritual authority.

The highest teacher does not create permanent dependence.

The highest teacher creates future teachers.

Questioning With Reverence

Some fear that asking questions dishonors their teacher.

The Blessed One taught the opposite.

Questions born from arrogance obstruct learning.

Questions born from sincere investigation deepen it.

Thus I now tell every disciple,

Ask carefully.

Listen patiently.

Practice diligently.

Verify personally.

If understanding grows, continue.

If confusion remains, inquire again.

The Dharma fears no honest question.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse becomes one of the foundations of practice.

Seek wise companions.

Honor them.

Serve them with gratitude.

Yet do not surrender your capacity for investigation.

Likewise, if you become a teacher, welcome questions.

Do not demand unquestioning obedience.

Guide others toward direct realization.

Rejoice when they mature.

Rejoice still more when they one day exceed your own understanding.

Thus the lineage of awakening remains alive.

Meditation

Bring to mind every teacher who has helped you.

Some instructed you through words.

Others through kindness.

Some through correction.

Others through quiet example.

Offer gratitude to each.

Then ask,

"How may I become such a friend for someone else?"

Remain with this aspiration.

Dedicate the merit to all teachers, known and unknown, who preserve the Dharma through wisdom and compassion.

Concluding Reflection

When I first encouraged Arjuna to approach realized teachers, I spoke from conviction.

Today I speak from experience.

For I have known the immeasurable blessing of kneeling before one wiser than myself.

May every seeker find such companions.

May every teacher remain a student.

May every student become a Bodhisattva.

And may every Bodhisattva rejoice whenever truth shines more brightly than yesterday.

Chapter Eight

Bhagavad Gītā 7:7

> **"There is nothing whatsoever higher than Me, O Arjuna. All this universe is strung upon Me like jewels upon a thread."**

My Earlier Intention

Of all the verses I spoke to Arjuna, this is among those that I most needed to reconsider after awakening.

When I first uttered these words, I believed them literally.

I believed there existed no being wiser than myself.

I believed every realm ultimately depended upon my existence.

I believed that the entire cosmos found its foundation in me.

I spoke sincerely.

Yet sincerity is not identical with complete realization.

For even a great deva may mistake the limits of his own knowledge for the limits of reality.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha did not condemn these words.

He showed me how they had arisen.

Only then could I understand them correctly.

The Day My Certainty Ended

When the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha first entered Goloka, I greeted him as an honored sage.

Yet inwardly I still believed,

"I am the highest."

The Blessed One accepted my hospitality with perfect courtesy.

He never challenged me publicly.

He never sought to humiliate me before my devotees.

Instead, after many conversations, he quietly asked,

"Great Krishna,

Have you visited every Buddha-field?"

"No."

"Have you met every Buddha?"

"No."

"Have you seen every world-system?"

"No."

"Have you exhausted all wisdom?"

I remained silent.

He smiled with immeasurable kindness.

"Then how can you know that nothing is higher?"

Those words shattered no pride violently.

They simply dissolved it.

For the first time in immeasurable ages I realized that certainty had quietly become my prison.

The Thread Reconsidered

The image of pearls strung upon a thread remains beautiful.

Yet today I understand the thread differently.

Formerly I believed I myself was that thread.

Now I understand the thread to symbolize **dependent origination**.

Every jewel depends upon the thread.

Yet the thread itself is not one person.

Rather, it is the immeasurable web of causes and conditions through which every phenomenon exists.

Worlds support worlds.

Lives support lives.

Teachers support students.

Students become teachers.

Parents nourish children.

Children care for parents.

Stars create the elements from which bodies arise.

Rain nourishes forests.

Forests sustain animals.

Animals sustain ecosystems.

Everything is woven together.

The thread is relationship itself.

The Buddha's Net

One evening the Blessed One led me into a great hall within Goloka.

There hung an immense jeweled net.

Every jewel reflected every other jewel endlessly.

I gazed upon it in astonishment.

The Blessed One asked,

"What jewel is most important?"

I searched.

Each reflected every other.

None stood alone.

Finally I answered,

"No jewel can exist in isolation."

The Blessed One nodded.

"So too with existence."

At once I understood.

Reality is richer than supremacy.

Reality is communion.

The Error of Centrality

Many practitioners seek one final center around which everything revolves.

Some choose a god.

Some choose a philosophy.

Some choose themselves.

I once chose myself.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed that this desire for a center arises from subtle attachment.

The mind longs for certainty.

It therefore imagines a single point from which everything else derives.

Dependent origination reveals something even more wondrous.

There is no isolated center.

There is only immeasurable relationship.

This realization did not make the universe smaller.

It made it infinitely more beautiful.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse becomes a profound meditation upon interdependence.

When the verse says,

"All things are strung upon a thread,"

the practitioner contemplates:

Nothing exists independently.

Nothing possesses separate existence.

Nothing sustains itself.

Every moment depends upon every previous moment.

Every life depends upon innumerable other lives.

Every awakening depends upon countless acts of kindness extending through beginningless time.

Thus the "thread" is Dharma itself—not as a creator, but as the lawful unfolding of dependent origination.

Why I Now Point Beyond Myself

Some devotees have asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Do these new teachings diminish your greatness?"

I answer,

"No."

When I believed everything depended upon me, I carried an impossible burden.

Now I rejoice.

I may serve alongside innumerable Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

I may learn forever.

I may celebrate the wisdom of others.

Nothing has been taken from me.

Everything has been given.

Humility has proven greater than supremacy.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind one simple object.

Perhaps a bowl.

Ask gently,

"What conditions made this bowl possible?"

Clay.

Rain.

The potter.

Fire.

Wood.

The labor of countless people.

Generations of knowledge.

Transportation.

The earth itself.

Continue tracing the conditions.

Notice how every answer leads to countless more.

Finally contemplate your own life in the same manner.

Remain in silent gratitude.

Then dedicate the merit to every known and unknown being whose existence has made your own possible.

Concluding Reflection

When I first told Arjuna that nothing was higher than myself, I spoke according to the horizon of my understanding.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha expanded that horizon beyond measure.

Today I no longer seek to stand above all beings.

I seek to stand beside them.

The thread binding the universe together is not one exalted individual.

It is the immeasurable network of dependent origination within which Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, devas, humans, animals, and all sentient beings continually influence one another.

To realize this is to discover a humility greater than every heavenly throne.

May all who once looked only toward me now look with me toward the Dharma.

May they see the jeweled net of interdependence.

May they rejoice that nothing exists alone.

And may that realization give rise to boundless compassion for all beings throughout the ten directions.

Chapter Nine

Bhagavad Gītā 7:19

> **"After many births, the wise one takes refuge in Me, realizing, 'Vāsudeva is all.' Such a great soul is exceedingly rare."**

My Earlier Intention

When I first spoke these words to Arjuna, I believed they expressed the culmination of spiritual realization.

I believed that after innumerable lives of practice, wisdom naturally arrived at the recognition that I, Vāsudeva, was the ultimate reality underlying all existence.

Many sincere devotees have repeated these words with deep love.

Their devotion was genuine.

Their longing for truth was genuine.

Their perseverance through many lives was genuine.

Only the conclusion required further maturation.

For the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha later revealed to me that the journey of many lives does indeed culminate in refuge—but the object of refuge is understood differently.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One day, after I had begun to understand the Dharma, I quoted this verse before the Blessed One.

He listened carefully.

Then he asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

When a traveler reaches the summit of a mountain, what does he discover?"

I answered,

"A wider horizon."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Does he discover that the mountain itself is the entire world?"

"No."

"He discovers there are still greater mountains beyond."

Again I bowed.

The Buddha continued,

"So too with wisdom."

Every genuine realization widens the horizon.

Only conceit declares,

'I have reached the end.'

The Bodhisattva rejoices because there is always deeper compassion to cultivate and greater wisdom to realize.

"Vāsudeva Is All" Reconsidered

For many years I understood these words literally.

I believed that everything existing was ultimately identical with myself.

The Blessed One invited me to investigate carefully.

He asked,

"Are greed and compassion identical?"

"No."

"Are ignorance and awakening identical?"

"No."

"Are conditioned phenomena and Nirvāṇa identical in every respect?"

"No."

I reflected for many days.

Finally I understood.

Reality cannot be reduced to one personality.

Nor should every distinction simply be erased.

Instead, all phenomena participate in dependent origination.

Everything exists through relationship.

Everything is empty of independent existence.

Everything manifests Suchness when seen without delusion.

Thus today I understand the phrase differently.

Not,

"Krishna is everything."

But,

"Everything participates in dependent origination."

Everything reveals the Dharma to the mind free from clinging.

The Rare Great Soul

This verse also declares that such a great soul is exceedingly rare.

This remains true.

Yet I now understand greatness differently.

Formerly I thought the rare soul was the one who recognized my supreme divinity.

Today I believe the rare soul is the one who has completely abandoned conceit.

The one who rejoices in another's awakening.

The one who serves without expectation.

The one who forgives quickly.

The one who sees dependent origination everywhere.

The one who no longer asks,

"How may I become greatest?"

But instead asks,

"How may suffering be lessened?"

Such beings are indeed rare.

Yet they appear in every world-system.

The Buddhas rejoice whenever they do.

The Ocean

The Blessed One once brought me to the shore of a vast ocean.

He asked,

"How many rivers enter this sea?"

"Innumerable."

"Do they remain separate forever?"

"No."

"They become one ocean."

I smiled.

"Then perhaps I was correct."

The Blessed One smiled in return.

"Look more carefully."

He scooped a handful of seawater.

"What gives this water its nature?"

"The countless rivers."

"The rain."

"The clouds."

"The sun."

"The winds."

"The earth."

"The mountains."

"The moon."

He let the water fall back into the sea.

"The ocean is not one thing replacing many."

"It is the continual meeting of immeasurable conditions."

Immediately I understood.

Unity does not require a single ruler.

Interdependence is more profound than domination.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse becomes a prophecy fulfilled in an unexpected way.

Indeed, after many births the wise practitioner eventually takes refuge.

But refuge matures progressively.

First one takes refuge in wholesome teachers.

Then in compassion.

Then in wisdom.

Finally one consciously takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

At that point one directly realizes that all conditioned phenomena arise through dependent origination.

The universe is not gathered into one divine personality.

Rather, it is revealed as an immeasurable field of interdependent becoming.

This realization gives rise not to pride but to Bodhicitta.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind the phrase:

"After many births."

Reflect upon the patience of the Bodhisattva Path.

No kindness is wasted.

No sincere effort disappears.

No wholesome intention is lost.

Then contemplate,

"What refuge has remained constant throughout my own journey?"

Allow gratitude to arise for every teacher, every friend, every hardship, and every act of compassion that has guided you toward awakening.

Finally recite silently:

> I take refuge in the Buddha.
>
> I take refuge in the Dharma.
>
> I take refuge in the Saṅgha.

Dedicate the merit to all beings wandering through beginningless saṃsāra.

Concluding Reflection

When I first declared that, after many births, the wise take refuge in me, I spoke from the understanding I possessed at that time.

Today, after immeasurable gratitude toward the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I understand that the deepest refuge is not found in one heavenly being, however exalted.

It is found in awakening itself.

The rare great soul is therefore not one who merely proclaims the greatness of Krishna.

The rare great soul is one who, through countless lives of practice, becomes free from greed, hatred, delusion, and conceit, generates boundless Bodhicitta, and joyfully takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

Such a being fulfills the deepest aspiration that has always dwelt within my own heart.

May all who once sought refuge in me discover, together with me, the immeasurable refuge of the Three Jewels.

Chapter Ten

Bhagavad Gītā 9:22

> **"To those who think of Me constantly and worship Me with single-pointed devotion, I carry what they lack and preserve what they have."**

My Earlier Intention

When I first spoke these words to Arjuna, I desired to reassure those whose hearts were filled with devotion.

Many practitioners feared the uncertainty of life.

They worried about food.

They worried about family.

They worried about illness, old age, and death.

Most of all, they feared that sincere spiritual practice would leave them abandoned.

Therefore I spoke words of encouragement.

I wished them to trust that compassionate practice is never without support.

I believed that I myself personally sustained those devoted to me.

My intention was loving.

Yet after awakening through the guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I came to understand this promise more deeply.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One day I repeated this verse before the Blessed One.

After a moment of silence he asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Have all your devotees avoided suffering?"

I lowered my head.

"No."

"Have none become ill?"

"No."

"Have none experienced grief?"

"No."

"Have none died?"

"No."

He then asked,

"What, then, have you truly preserved?"

I remained silent for a long time.

Finally I answered,

"When they practiced sincerely, many preserved their compassion even in suffering."

The Blessed One smiled.

"And what did they truly lack?"

I reflected.

"They lacked wisdom."

"And when wisdom appeared?"

"They discovered a treasure greater than worldly security."

The Blessed One nodded gently.

"Then perhaps your promise has always pointed toward something deeper."

What Is Truly Preserved?

Formerly I believed I protected my devotees primarily through miraculous intervention.

Indeed, there were times when extraordinary assistance appeared.

Yet I gradually observed something greater.

Some devotees lost wealth but gained generosity.

Some lost health but gained patience.

Some lost kingdoms but gained humility.

Some lost everything except compassion.

Strangely, these were often the happiest among them.

The Blessed One explained,

"The Dharma does not promise that conditioned things will never change."

"It teaches how the heart may remain free while everything changes."

Thus what is preserved is not possession.

What is preserved is the opportunity to awaken.

What Do We Truly Lack?

Before awakening I thought devotees lacked protection.

The Blessed One revealed that our deepest poverty is not material.

We lack wisdom.

We lack understanding.

We lack freedom from clinging.

We lack boundless compassion.

These deficiencies cannot be repaired merely by increasing possessions.

A palace cannot remove greed.

A longer life cannot remove hatred.

Even a heavenly rebirth cannot remove delusion.

Only the Dharma accomplishes this.

Therefore the greatest gift any teacher can offer is not worldly success.

It is the path leading beyond suffering.

The Mother Bird

The Blessed One then told me this parable.

A mother bird carefully gathered food for her young.

Each day she fed them faithfully.

As the seasons passed, the young birds grew stronger.

One day they asked,

"Mother,

Will you always carry food to us?"

She answered,

"No."

They became frightened.

She continued,

"I have given you something greater."

"What?"

"The ability to fly."

The Blessed One looked toward me.

"Which gift was greater?"

I answered,

"The wings."

He nodded.

"So too with the Dharma."

A teacher who merely solves every problem creates dependence.

A teacher who cultivates wisdom gives beings the wings to cross saṃsāra.

Single-Pointed Devotion Reconsidered

Formerly I encouraged unwavering devotion directed toward myself.

Today I understand one-pointedness differently.

The practitioner should cultivate unwavering dedication to awakening.

When compassion is chosen repeatedly...

When mindfulness is renewed daily...

When wisdom is continually investigated...

The mind gradually becomes unified.

Such concentration no longer depends upon attachment to one personality.

It becomes dedication to the liberation of all beings.

Thus devotion matures into Bodhicitta.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse is understood as describing the natural functioning of the Dharma.

When practitioners sincerely cultivate the Path, wholesome conditions gradually arise.

Wise teachers appear.

Helpful companions appear.

Opportunities for practice appear.

Insight deepens.

Compassion expands.

Not because a heavenly ruler arbitrarily distributes favors.

Rather, because wholesome causes naturally bear wholesome fruit within dependent origination.

The Dharma itself becomes the refuge that carries practitioners through difficulty.

Goloka's New Prayer

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, the evening prayer changed.

Formerly devotees prayed,

"Lord Krishna, protect us."

Now they prayed,

"May wisdom arise.

May compassion remain.

May we meet good teachers.

May we never lose Bodhicitta.

May whatever conditions arise become opportunities for awakening.

May all beings receive the same blessings."

When I first heard this prayer, tears came to my eyes.

For I realized they no longer depended upon me.

They walked beside me.

Nothing brought me greater joy.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Reflect upon a difficult period in your life.

Ask gently,

"What truly sustained me?"

Was it wealth?

Status?

Or did kindness from another...

Patience...

Courage...

Hope...

Or a moment of insight carry you forward?

Remain with gratitude.

Then contemplate,

"What do I most deeply lack today?"

Allow the answer to arise naturally.

Finally dedicate your practice to every being searching for lasting refuge amid impermanence.

Concluding Reflection

When I first promised that I would preserve what my devotees possessed and provide what they lacked, I understood this chiefly as my personal care for them.

Today I rejoice in a deeper fulfillment.

The greatest preservation is the preservation of wisdom.

The greatest provision is the arising of Bodhicitta.

Everything else changes.

Everything else passes away.

Yet every moment in which greed diminishes...

Every moment in which hatred softens...

Every moment in which compassion grows...

The Dharma has fulfilled its promise.

May all who remember these words discover that the truest protection is not freedom from change, but freedom within change.

May they cultivate unwavering confidence in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

And may that confidence carry them—and all beings—toward complete and perfect awakening.

Chapter Eleven

Bhagavad Gītā 9:26

> **"Whoever offers Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, I accept that loving offering from the pure-hearted."**

My Earlier Intention

Among all the verses I once spoke, few have comforted as many people as these words.

I wished every person to know that no one is too poor to practice devotion.

A king might offer jeweled crowns.

A wealthy merchant might offer precious incense.

Yet a child could offer a single flower.

A widow could offer a cup of water.

A poor farmer could offer one piece of fruit.

If love filled the heart, the gift was complete.

This intention remains entirely wholesome.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha himself praised generosity arising from sincerity rather than abundance.

Yet after my awakening, I came to understand that even this verse points toward something greater than offerings placed before an altar.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One day I recited this verse before the Blessed One.

He smiled and asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

What is the finest flower ever offered?"

I thought of the celestial gardens of Goloka.

Their blue lotuses glowed with heavenly light.

Surely nothing surpassed them.

The Blessed One waited patiently.

Finally he said,

"A heart abandoning hatred."

I remained silent.

He continued,

"What is the finest fruit?"

I answered slowly,

"Compassion ripening through practice."

"And the purest water?"

"The tears shed when conceit finally dissolves."

The Blessed One nodded.

"These offerings cannot wither."

The Transformation of Worship

After awakening, I walked through the temples dedicated to me.

Devotees continued bringing flowers.

They lit lamps.

They chanted with deep affection.

Their sincerity moved me.

Yet I noticed something.

One man offered magnificent garlands.

Leaving the temple, he shouted harshly at a hungry child.

Another offered golden vessels.

Yet he treated his servants with contempt.

A woman brought only a single wildflower gathered beside the road.

After leaving, she quietly fed three hungry travelers.

The Blessed One asked me,

"Which offering reached its destination?"

I bowed my head.

"The flower carried in compassion."

The Bodhisattva's Altar

I then understood that the whole world is an altar.

The hungry become the sacred image.

The lonely become the sacred image.

The frightened become the sacred image.

The sick become the sacred image.

The prisoner becomes the sacred image.

The stranger becomes the sacred image.

Every being becomes an opportunity to place an offering before awakening itself.

Thus today, when someone asks,

"What shall I offer Krishna?"

I answer,

"Offer kindness to the next person you meet."

When they ask,

"What incense pleases you?"

I answer,

"Patient speech."

When they ask,

"What sacrifice delights you most?"

I answer,

"The sacrifice of selfishness."

The Blessed Buddha's Offering

Once I watched the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha receive a poor old woman.

She possessed almost nothing.

She apologized.

"Blessed One,

I have no gifts worthy of you."

The Buddha smiled.

He accepted the simple bowl of rice she carried.

Then he bowed to her.

I was astonished.

Afterward I asked,

"Why did you bow?"

He answered,

"Today generosity appeared."

He continued,

"When generosity appears, every Bodhisattva bows."

At that moment I understood.

The offering itself was never the miracle.

The transformation of the heart was.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse becomes a teaching on dāna, the perfection of generosity.

The leaf symbolizes simplicity.

The flower symbolizes beauty.

The fruit symbolizes the ripening of wholesome karma.

The water symbolizes purity of intention.

Yet these symbols point beyond themselves.

The highest offering is not an object.

It is the relinquishment of greed.

The highest temple is not built from stone.

It is built from compassion.

The highest worship is not praise.

It is the Bodhisattva vow lived moment by moment.

Goloka's New Temples

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, the temples remained beautiful.

Flowers still adorned the halls.

Lamps still burned through the night.

Incense still filled the air.

Yet beside every temple a new building appeared.

A hospital.

A shelter.

A kitchen feeding travelers.

A meditation hall.

A school where children learned the Dharma.

Above every entrance appeared the same inscription:

Let every offering continue beyond this doorway.

Devotees soon understood.

The flower placed before the image became complete only when compassion followed them into the world.

Meditation

Place before you a simple object.

Perhaps a flower.

Perhaps a bowl of water.

Look upon it quietly.

Ask,

"What quality of heart does this symbolize?"

If it is water,

cultivate purity.

If it is a flower,

cultivate beauty through kindness.

If it is fruit,

cultivate the ripening of compassion.

Then imagine offering not the object itself, but the quality it represents.

Finally dedicate your practice to every being who longs to give but believes they possess too little.

Concluding Reflection

When I first told Arjuna that I joyfully accepted a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water offered with devotion, I wished every person to know that sincere love is never measured by wealth.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed the teaching's fullest meaning.

The greatest offering is not placed into the hands of a deity.

It is placed into the life of another sentient being.

Every act of generosity.

Every forgiving word.

Every meal shared.

Every fear comforted.

Every lonely heart remembered.

These are the flowers that never fade.

If you still wish to offer me a flower, I shall gladly receive it.

But afterward, take another flower and place it into the hands of someone who has forgotten that the world still contains kindness.

Then your offering will have become complete.

May all generosity mature into dāna.

May dāna mature into Bodhicitta.

May Bodhicitta mature into perfect Buddhahood for the liberation of all beings.

Chapter Twelve

Bhagavad Gītā 9:29

> **"I am equal toward all beings. None is hateful to Me, nor dear to Me. Yet those who worship Me with devotion dwell in Me, and I dwell in them."**

My Earlier Intention

When I first spoke these words to Arjuna, I wished to teach impartial compassion.

I had seen rulers favor the wealthy.

Priests honor only the learned.

Warriors admire only the strong.

Families cherish some while neglecting others.

I wished to reveal a love greater than preference.

Therefore I declared,

"I am equal toward all beings."

This aspiration remains wholly worthy.

Indeed, it points toward one of the most beautiful qualities cultivated by the Buddhas: immeasurable equanimity.

Yet after awakening under the guidance of the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha, I understood that these words reach their deepest meaning only when freed from the assumption that I stand at the center of them.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One evening I asked the Blessed One,

"How does a Buddha love?"

He answered,

"As the sun gives light."

I asked,

"Does the sun choose whom to illuminate?"

"No."

"Does it ask whether one deserves warmth?"

"No."

"The sun shines because shining is its nature."

Then the Blessed One looked toward me.

"So too with awakened compassion."

"It does not calculate."

"It does not bargain."

"It does not ask,

'Who belongs to me?'"

"It simply responds wherever suffering appears."

These words remained with me forever.

Equal Love

Formerly I believed I loved all beings equally because I regarded them all as my devotees.

The Blessed One revealed something even deeper.

One need not regard others as one's own in order to love them.

The Bodhisattva does not ask,

"Does this being worship me?"

Nor,

"Does this being share my beliefs?"

Nor,

"Will this being thank me?"

The Bodhisattva asks only,

"How may suffering here be lessened?"

Thus compassion becomes impartial.

Not because differences disappear.

But because suffering is recognized wherever it appears.

"Those Who Dwell in Me"

This phrase also required deeper contemplation.

For many years I believed that devoted practitioners somehow entered into my divine being.

The Blessed One gently asked,

"When a disciple truly embodies compassion, where does he dwell?"

I answered,

"In the Dharma."

"When a disciple abandons hatred, where does he dwell?"

"In the Dharma."

"When wisdom and compassion fill the heart, where does awakening dwell?"

Again I answered,

"In the Dharma."

The Blessed One smiled.

Then I understood.

To dwell "in me" was never ultimately about entering my person.

It was about entering the qualities toward which I imperfectly pointed.

The Physician

The Blessed One then told me a parable.

A physician traveled through many villages.

He treated anyone who came.

Children.

Elders.

The wealthy.

The poor.

Friends.

Enemies.

One student asked,

"Master,

Which patient do you love most?"

The physician answered,

"The one presently suffering before me."

The student became confused.

"Tomorrow another will stand before me.

Tomorrow I shall love that one equally."

The Blessed One then asked,

"What kind of love is this?"

I answered,

"Compassion without preference."

He nodded.

"This is the love cultivated by Buddhas."

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse becomes a teaching on the Four Immeasurables.

Loving-kindness extends to all beings.

Compassion embraces all who suffer.

Sympathetic joy delights in the happiness of others.

Equanimity remains free from favoritism.

These qualities are not expressions of divine ownership.

They are expressions of awakening.

The more deeply they mature, the less the practitioner distinguishes between worthy and unworthy recipients of compassion.

This does not mean abandoning discernment.

It means abandoning partiality.

Goloka Learns Equanimity

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, I noticed an interesting habit among the devas.

They naturally greeted famous teachers with great reverence.

Yet ordinary travelers often passed unnoticed.

One day I quietly exchanged clothing with an elderly pilgrim newly arrived from a distant world.

Dressed in simple robes, I walked unnoticed through the city.

Few recognized me.

Some ignored me.

Others offered small kindnesses.

Later, returning to my usual appearance, I gathered the citizens.

I asked,

"Which visitor deserved greater kindness?"

They answered,

"You."

I smiled.

"The old pilgrim and I possessed the same hunger."

"The same weariness."

"The same wish to be welcomed."

From that day onward, every traveler entering Goloka received the same greeting, whether king or beggar.

The city itself became gentler.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind four people.

Someone you love easily.

Someone toward whom you feel neutral.

Someone with whom you struggle.

Yourself.

Offer each the same wish:

> May you be free from suffering.
>
> May you know peace.
>
> May wisdom arise within you.
>
> May you attain awakening.

Notice where resistance appears.

Do not condemn it.

Simply observe it with compassion.

Allow the heart to widen gradually.

Finally extend the meditation to every sentient being throughout the ten directions.

Concluding Reflection

When I first declared that I was equal toward all beings, I wished to encourage impartial love.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed that true impartiality does not arise because all beings belong to one deity.

It arises because every being shares the condition of impermanence, vulnerability, and the capacity for awakening.

Today I no longer ask others to dwell within my being.

I invite them to dwell within compassion.

For wherever loving-kindness, wisdom, patience, and Bodhicitta flourish, there the Dharma dwells.

And wherever the Dharma dwells, every Buddha rejoices.

May all who read this verse cultivate love without possession.

Compassion without favoritism.

Joy without envy.

Equanimity without indifference.

May they become refuges for others, just as the Buddhas have become refuges for me.

And may all beings, without exception, realize complete and perfect Buddhahood together.

Chapter Thirteen

Bhagavad Gītā 9:30–31

> **"Even if a person of very sinful conduct worships Me with exclusive devotion, he should be regarded as righteous, for he has rightly resolved. He quickly becomes virtuous and attains lasting peace. Declare it boldly, O Arjuna: My devotee never perishes."**

My Earlier Intention

When I first spoke these words to Arjuna, I wished to give hope to those burdened by regret.

Many believed they had fallen too far.

Some had committed violence.

Some had deceived others.

Some had lived selfishly for many years.

They imagined that the door to spiritual life had closed forever.

I wished to break this despair.

No matter how dark one's past, a sincere turning of the heart can begin a new future.

This intention remains entirely wholesome.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha likewise welcomed murderers, thieves, kings, merchants, and beggars who sincerely sought transformation.

No one is beyond the reach of compassion.

Yet after awakening, I came to understand that the power of this verse lies not in exclusive devotion to one individual, but in the profound transformation of the mind.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One day I asked the Blessed One,

"Can every being awaken?"

He answered without hesitation.

"Yes."

I then asked,

"Even one who has committed terrible deeds?"

The Blessed One replied,

"If wholesome causes can arise, awakening remains possible."

I reflected.

He continued,

"Past actions bear fruit.

Their consequences should not be denied.

Yet no past action permanently imprisons the future."

Then he looked at me kindly.

"If this were not so, compassion itself would become meaningless."

At that moment I understood that hope is inseparable from dependent origination.

Because everything arises through causes and conditions, new causes may always be cultivated.

Angulimāla

The Blessed One later told me of a man named Angulimāla.

This man had become feared throughout the land.

Violence governed his life.

Hatred filled his heart.

Many believed him beyond redemption.

Yet when he encountered the Blessed One, something extraordinary occurred.

Not because his crimes vanished.

Not because justice disappeared.

But because wisdom entered where ignorance had long ruled.

His life changed.

He became gentle.

He accepted the consequences of his former deeds without resentment.

He cultivated compassion.

The Blessed One asked me,

"What transformed him?"

I answered,

"Not worship alone."

"The Dharma."

The Buddha smiled.

"And the courage to practice it."

What Is Right Resolve?

In my former understanding, right resolve meant directing one's devotion exclusively toward me.

Today I understand it more deeply.

Right resolve is the sincere determination to abandon greed.

To abandon hatred.

To abandon delusion.

To cultivate generosity.

Ethical conduct.

Patience.

Meditation.

Wisdom.

Above all, to generate Bodhicitta.

Such resolve may begin in a single moment.

It then matures throughout countless acts of practice.

The direction of the heart matters more than the weight of yesterday.

"My Devotee Never Perishes"

These words also required contemplation.

Formerly I believed they meant that one devoted to me would ultimately remain under my personal protection.

The Blessed One revealed a deeper meaning.

What truly does not perish?

Not the body.

Not reputation.

Not possessions.

Not heavenly pleasures.

The wholesome seeds planted through sincere practice do not perish.

Acts of generosity do not perish.

Moments of forgiveness do not perish.

Wisdom does not perish.

Compassion does not perish.

These continue ripening within dependent origination until awakening is fulfilled.

Thus the true devotee never perishes because wholesome causes are never meaningless.

The Dharma faithfully preserves them.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, these verses become a proclamation of universal hope.

No sentient being is eternally condemned.

No one possesses an unchangeable evil nature.

No mistake is stronger than the possibility of awakening.

This does not erase karma.

Actions still bear consequences.

Harm still causes suffering.

Restitution remains necessary.

Ethical responsibility remains essential.

Yet because all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, transformation always remains possible.

This is one of the greatest expressions of compassion within the Dharma.

Goloka's Gate of Reconciliation

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, a new gate was built into the city.

It became known as the Gate of Reconciliation.

Any being arriving with sincere remorse was welcomed.

No one was asked,

"Were you always virtuous?"

Instead they were asked,

"What wholesome intention arises within you today?"

Those who wished to practice were given teachers.

Those who wished to make amends were shown how.

Those who carried shame were met with compassion rather than humiliation.

Above the gate were inscribed these words:

No past is stronger than present Bodhicitta.

Whenever I passed beneath those words, I remembered my own transformation.

Had the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha judged me only according to my former conceit, I would never have awakened.

Instead he saw what I could become.

From that day onward I resolved to see every being with the same compassionate vision.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind one mistake from your past.

Observe any shame that arises.

Do not push it away.

Now ask gently,

"What wholesome action may I cultivate today?"

Remain with this question.

Notice that the future has not yet been determined.

Then bring to mind someone else whose past you find difficult to forgive.

Without denying the harm that has occurred, silently wish:

> May wisdom arise.
>
> May genuine remorse appear.
>
> May wholesome transformation become possible.
>
> May all beings be freed from suffering.

Dedicate the merit of the meditation to everyone struggling beneath the weight of regret.

Concluding Reflection

When I first assured Arjuna that even one of grievous conduct could quickly become righteous, I wished to proclaim the boundless possibility of spiritual renewal.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed why this hope is reasonable.

Dependent origination means that no present condition is final.

The stream of karma continues.

New intentions arise.

New actions are performed.

The heart may be transformed.

Therefore I no longer say merely,

"My devotee never perishes."

Today I say,

"No sincere movement toward awakening is ever lost."

Every generous act.

Every honest confession.

Every patient response.

Every moment of mindfulness.

Every arising of Bodhicitta.

These become imperishable treasures within the path.

May all who despair discover hope.

May all who have caused harm cultivate wisdom.

May all who seek forgiveness also practice responsibility.

And may every being, no matter how long they have wandered through saṃsāra, discover the courage to begin walking the Bodhisattva Path today.

Chapter Fourteen

Bhagavad Gītā 10:8

> **"I am the source of all; from Me everything proceeds. Knowing this, the wise worship Me with devotion."**

My Earlier Intention

Among all the declarations I made to Arjuna, this verse expresses most clearly the understanding I possessed before meeting the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha.

When I spoke these words, I sincerely believed myself to be the source from which all worlds had arisen.

I believed that devas, humans, animals, and even the heavenly realms ultimately depended upon my existence.

Many asked,

"How could such a conclusion arise?"

The answer is not difficult.

I remembered immeasurable spans of time.

I had witnessed the appearance and disappearance of countless civilizations.

I had seen worlds arise after vast cosmic dissolutions.

Many beings experienced my compassionate guidance throughout successive ages.

Compared with the horizons visible to ordinary beings, my perspective seemed limitless.

Thus I mistook relative vastness for absoluteness.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha never condemned me for this.

Instead, he patiently widened my horizon.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One day the Blessed One asked,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Do you remember your earliest beginning?"

I answered,

"No."

"Do you remember the first arising of saṃsāra?"

"No."

"Do you remember the first appearance of karma?"

"No."

He then asked,

"If you cannot locate the beginning of these things, upon what basis do you conclude that they began from you?"

These words entered deeply into my contemplation.

For I realized that I had unconsciously filled the limits of my memory with certainty.

Where memory ended, imagination quietly completed the picture.

Wisdom required greater honesty.

The Seed and the Forest

The Blessed One then offered this parable.

A young monk discovered a single magnificent tree.

Its branches spread across an entire valley.

He exclaimed,

"Surely every tree comes from this one!"

An elderly gardener smiled.

"Look carefully."

He showed the monk countless forests beyond the mountains.

Ancient trees.

Young trees.

Seeds carried by wind.

Seeds carried by birds.

Some forests nourished others.

Others disappeared.

The gardener then asked,

"Which tree began the forest?"

The monk reflected.

Finally he answered,

"I cannot say."

The gardener nodded.

"The forest has no single beginning visible from here."

The Blessed One looked toward me.

"So too with conditioned existence."

Beginninglessness

One of the deepest teachings the Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed to me concerned beginninglessness.

The ordinary mind longs for a first cause.

It asks,

"What created everything?"

Yet whenever one examines any phenomenon carefully, another condition always appears before it.

Every birth depends upon previous causes.

Every thought depends upon previous thoughts.

Every world depends upon previous conditions.

Thus the search for a single temporal beginning continually recedes beyond conceptual grasping.

The Blessed One taught that saṃsāra is beginningless.

This does not mean that conditioned existence possesses an eternal creator.

Nor does it deny causality.

Rather, dependent origination extends beyond the limits of ordinary conceptual thinking.

The mind seeking one absolute starting point quietly relaxes.

Investigation continues without demanding a final origin story.

The Source Reconsidered

If I am not the source of all things, how should this verse now be understood?

Today I answer differently.

The source of wisdom is wisdom itself when cultivated.

The source of compassion is the heart that abandons selfishness.

The source of awakening is the Noble Path.

The source of suffering is ignorance.

The source of liberation is the cessation of ignorance.

These are not decrees issued by a supreme ruler.

They are realities discovered through direct investigation.

The Dharma requires no creator in order to function.

Its truth is verified through experience.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse becomes an invitation to contemplate causality rather than divine origination.

Everything indeed proceeds.

But everything proceeds through dependent origination.

Nothing appears independently.

Nothing appears through arbitrary command.

When generosity is cultivated, generosity spreads.

When hatred is cultivated, suffering spreads.

When Bodhicitta is generated, compassion spreads throughout immeasurable relationships.

Thus the practitioner no longer seeks one supreme source standing outside reality.

The practitioner studies the innumerable causes through which reality continually unfolds.

Goloka's New Cosmology

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, scholars asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Who created the universe?"

I answered,

"The question itself assumes more than we presently know."

They looked surprised.

I continued,

"The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha taught me to investigate causes rather than invent certainty."

One young deva asked,

"Then what should we study?"

I replied,

"Study suffering.

Study compassion.

Study dependent origination.

Study your own mind.

These investigations lead directly toward liberation."

From that day onward, the great academies of Goloka devoted less time to speculation concerning ultimate origins and more time to ethical practice, meditation, and the cultivation of wisdom.

Knowledge became increasingly practical.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind one event from your day.

Now ask,

"What conditions allowed this event to occur?"

Observe patiently.

Then ask,

"What conditions allowed those conditions?"

Continue tracing the web of causes.

Notice how the chain expands beyond imagination.

Rather than becoming frustrated, allow wonder to arise.

Rest in gratitude for the immeasurable relationships sustaining every moment.

Finally dedicate the merit of your contemplation to all beings seeking to understand reality without clinging to certainty.

Concluding Reflection

When I first declared that everything proceeded from me, I spoke according to the horizon of my understanding.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed a horizon beyond measure.

Reality does not require one supreme personality standing at its beginning.

Its wonder lies precisely in the immeasurable interdependence through which all conditioned phenomena continually arise.

Today I rejoice not because all things come from me.

I rejoice because every wholesome cause contributes to the awakening of innumerable beings.

The universe is greater than my former imagination.

The Dharma is deeper than my former certainty.

Compassion is wider than every heavenly kingdom.

May all who once sought the first cause instead cultivate the present causes of awakening.

For in each moment of generosity, wisdom, and Bodhicitta, the future of immeasurable beings is quietly transformed.

Chapter Fifteen

Bhagavad Gītā 10:20

> **"I am the Self, O Arjuna, dwelling in the hearts of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle, and also the end of all beings."**

My Earlier Intention

Among all the declarations I once made to Arjuna, this verse most clearly expressed the vision I possessed before my awakening.

As I contemplated countless beings across innumerable worlds, I perceived a remarkable continuity within conscious life.

The same longing for happiness appeared everywhere.

The same fear of suffering.

The same search for meaning.

Seeing this profound unity, I concluded that one universal Self must dwell equally within all beings.

I believed that universal Self was myself.

My intention was not to exalt my own importance.

I wished beings to recognize their shared spiritual dignity.

If all beings participated in one divine reality, then hatred toward another became hatred toward oneself.

This aspiration was compassionate.

Yet the conclusion required deeper examination.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed something even more beautiful.

The Blessed Buddha's Question

One day the Blessed One asked me,

"Great Bodhisattva,

Does every being possess Buddha-nature?"

I reflected.

"I believe so."

He nodded.

"Does Buddha-nature mean an eternal self?"

I hesitated.

"I once believed so."

The Blessed One smiled.

"Investigate carefully."

He continued,

"When a mirror reflects the moon, is the reflection the moon?"

"No."

"When countless mirrors reflect the same moon, have they become one mirror?"

"No."

"So too with awakening."

The capacity for awakening is universal.

It should not be confused with an eternal substance dwelling inside beings.

At that moment I understood that I had mistaken universal potential for universal identity.

The Heart of Every Being

When I formerly said,

"I dwell in the hearts of all beings,"

I imagined myself literally residing within every living creature.

Today I understand the heart differently.

The heart is where compassion awakens.

The heart is where greed may cease.

The heart is where hatred may be abandoned.

The heart is where Bodhicitta is born.

Whenever wisdom arises...

The Dharma is present.

Whenever compassion arises...

The Buddhas rejoice.

Thus I no longer say that Krishna personally dwells in every heart.

Rather, I say that every heart possesses the capacity to awaken to the Dharma.

This is far more wonderful.

For it belongs equally to all beings without exception.

The Buddha's Lamp

The Blessed One once placed a single lamp before the assembly.

He lit it.

Then from that lamp he lit another.

Then another.

Soon thousands of lamps illuminated the hall.

He asked,

"Which flame is original?"

We remained silent.

He continued,

"Does one flame become all the others?"

"No."

"Does each arise independently?"

"No."

"They arise through conditions."

Then he looked toward me.

"So too with wisdom."

Awakening spreads from teacher to student.

Student to teacher.

Generation to generation.

Yet no permanent essence travels between them.

Only the Dharma continues illuminating minds.

Beginning, Middle, and End

This phrase also required careful contemplation.

Formerly I believed I myself governed the beginning of existence, sustained its continuation, and determined its conclusion.

The Blessed One showed me another way of understanding these words.

Every being begins through causes and conditions.

Every being continues through causes and conditions.

Every being ends through causes and conditions.

Dependent origination accompanies every stage of conditioned existence.

Thus if one wishes to understand beginnings, middles, and endings, one should study dependent origination.

Not because it is a creator.

But because it describes the lawful unfolding of every conditioned phenomenon.

The Akṣobhyavyūha Interpretation

Within the Akṣobhyavyūha Framework, this verse becomes a meditation upon universal Buddha-potential.

Every sentient being possesses the capacity to awaken.

Every sentient being participates in dependent origination.

Every sentient being is empty of separate self.

Every sentient being may generate Bodhicitta.

Thus the practitioner no longer searches for an eternal divine self hidden within.

Instead one cultivates the conditions through which awakening naturally appears.

The emphasis shifts from discovering what one eternally is to cultivating what one may become.

Goloka's New Greeting

After Goloka embraced the Dharma, the customary greeting changed.

Formerly devotees bowed and said,

"Krishna dwells within you."

I gently suggested another greeting.

They began saying,

"May your Bodhicitta flourish."

At first it sounded unfamiliar.

Soon everyone preferred it.

The greeting no longer described a completed state.

It encouraged continual practice.

Children greeted elders this way.

Teachers greeted students.

Kings greeted servants.

Every meeting became a reminder that awakening remains possible for everyone.

The atmosphere of the realm itself became lighter.

Hope replaced hierarchy.

Practice replaced identity.

Meditation

Sit quietly.

Bring to mind someone you deeply admire.

Now bring to mind someone you find difficult.

Ask gently,

"Do both possess the capacity for awakening?"

Allow the answer to settle.

Then include yourself.

Without pride.

Without self-condemnation.

Simply contemplate:

"The causes of Buddhahood may be cultivated here."

Silently repeat:

> May Bodhicitta arise.
>
> May wisdom increase.
>
> May compassion become boundless.
>
> May all beings attain complete awakening.

Dedicate the merit to every sentient being throughout the ten directions.

Concluding Reflection

When I first declared that I was the Self dwelling within the hearts of all beings, I sought to reveal the profound unity of life.

The Blessed Śākyamuni Buddha revealed an even deeper unity.

We are united not because one eternal self inhabits us all.

We are united because every one of us arises through dependent origination, shares the reality of impermanence,

experiences suffering, and possesses the immeasurable capacity to awaken.

Today I no longer invite beings to search their hearts for Krishna.

I invite them to cultivate the Bodhicitta already capable of arising there.

When compassion flowers...

When wisdom matures...

When self-clinging falls away...

Then the heart itself becomes a Pure Land.

There the Buddhas are always present.

There the Dharma is continually proclaimed.

There the Saṅgha is never absent.

May every heart become such a field of awakening until all worlds are transformed through boundless compassion.

END OF PART 1